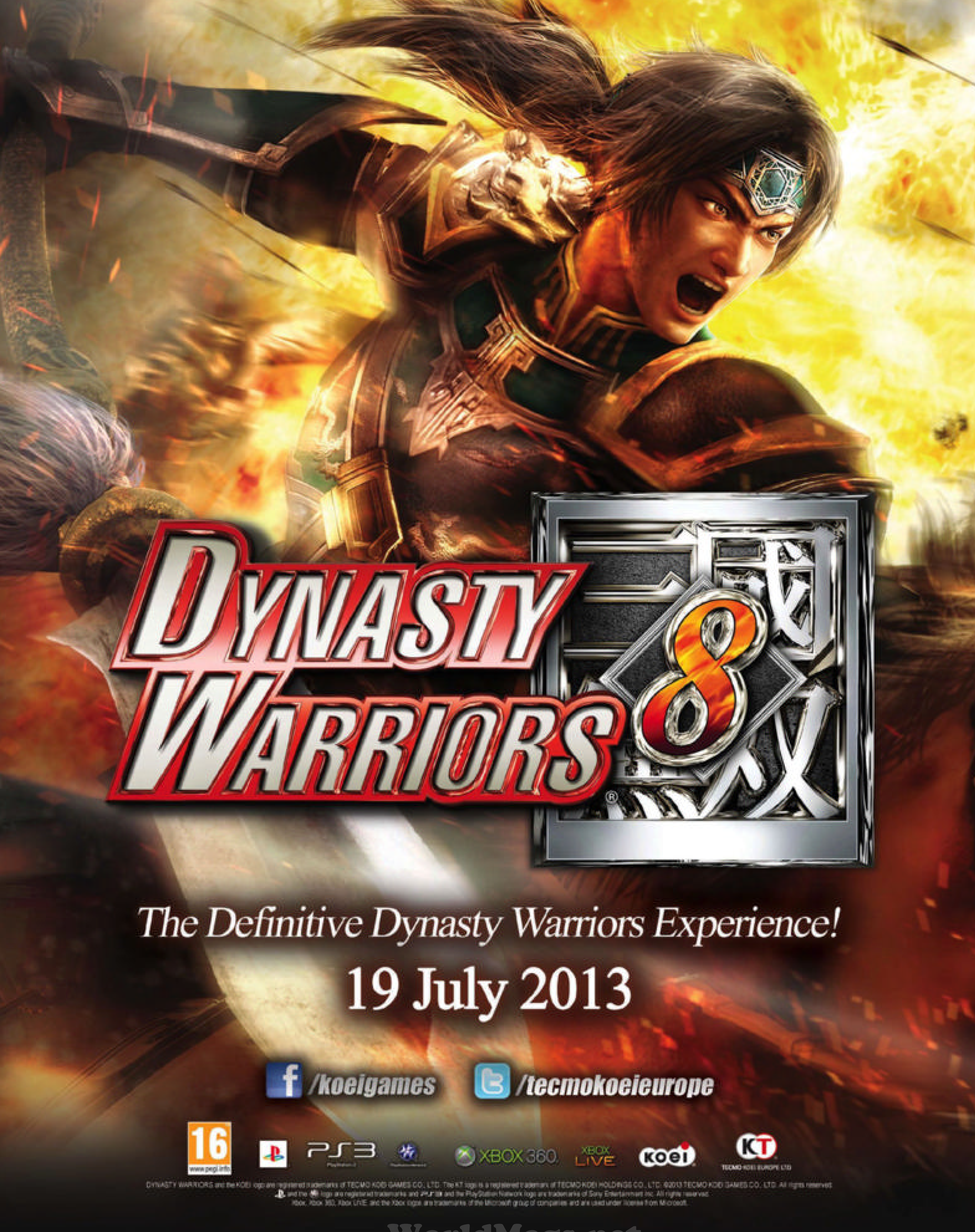

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I tried to make a Top 5 of E3 list when I returned from my first trip to the show this year, but after some introspection over a frozen pizza, I decided against it. And besides, what an arbitrary, SEO-friendly way to categorise so many of the amazing titles out there.

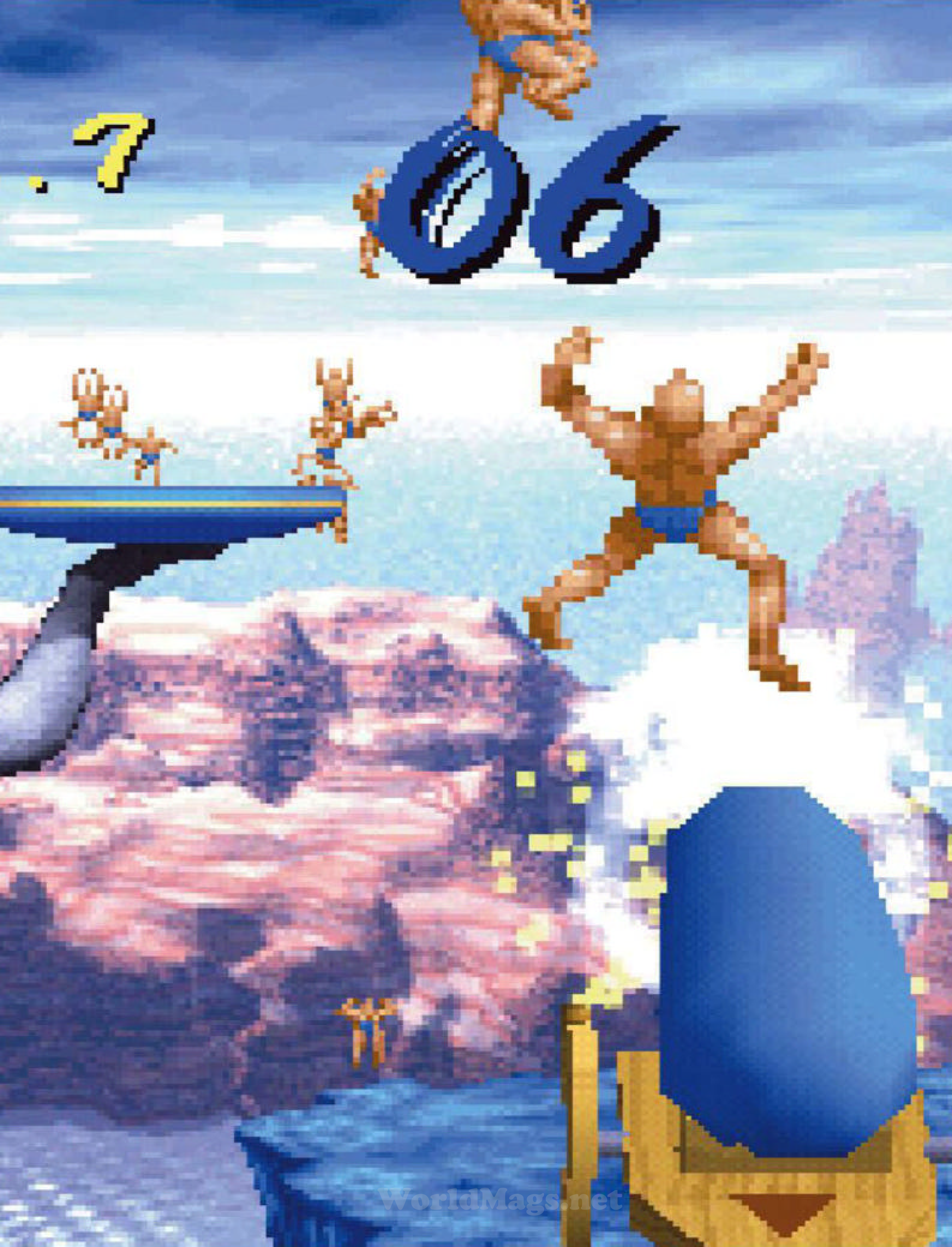
But what if, at gunpoint, I had to? Well, since we're on the subject: 5. *Need For Speed: Rivals*, 4. *The Division*, 3. *Thief*, 2. *InFamous: Second Son*, 1. *The Witcher 3*. Titles as diverse as *Transistor* and *Tearaway* were equally important to making this past E3 feel mighty again, too.

I felt there was a lot more creativity going into triple-A titles at this E3, a drive to bring some real flavour to that crucial type of mainstream-friendly product. I hope we can share our enthusiasm for the future with you this month, while exposing the games and policies that may be holding the industry back.

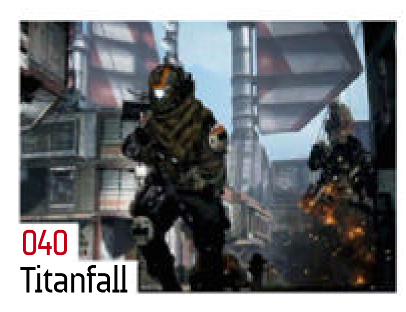
My personal highlight of E3 was the final appointment I had, however: interviewing Masahiro Sakurai, creator of *Smash Bros*. His attitude towards game design will engage and entertain you as much as it did for me, as he discusses the game that could reverse the Wii U's early misfortunes.

Samuel Roberts
EDITOR


10
13

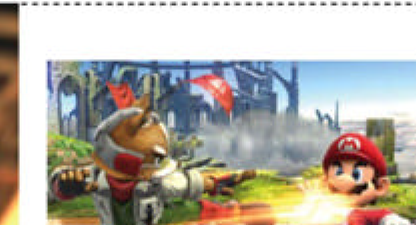

06

Contents



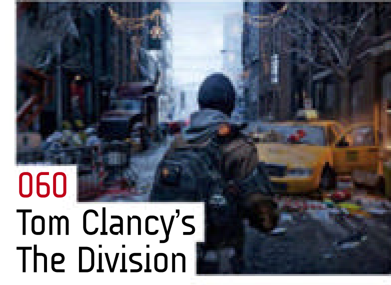
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054 Super Smash Bros.

RETRO



060 Tom Clancy's The Division

FAVOURITES

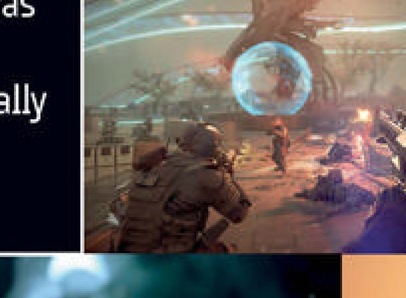
 Turn to page 102

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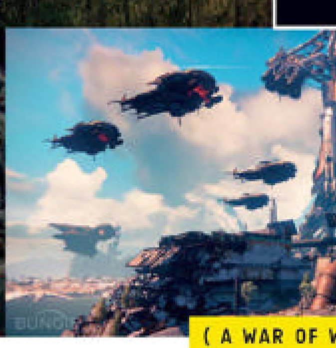
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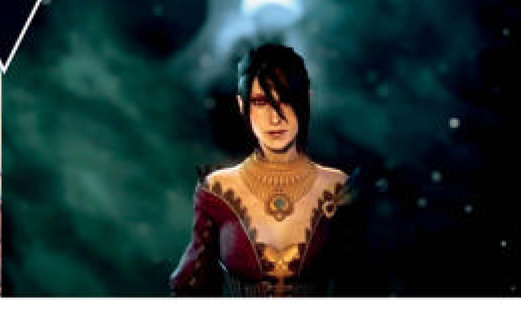




"[Last generation], there was a lot of looking at how we make games nicer. I don't really feel that pressure now"
Keiji Inafune, Mega Man creator







(A WAR OF WORDS)

XBOX ONE & PLAYSTATION 4: WHAT THE DEVELOPERS THINK



→ Peter Molyneux, Denis Dyack, Keiji Inafune, Respawn Entertainment, Bungie and eight other developers speak out about the Xbox One and PlayStation 4



We are still four months away from the launch of Microsoft's Xbox One and Sony's PlayStation 4, but the first shots in the renewed console war have already been fired. This is the first Cold War of the videogames industry, with more energy spent on DRM mind games and psychological warfare than promoting the actual products the companies expect us to lay our pre-orders down on this winter.

"It kind of felt like a playground scrap," says 22 Cans CEO Peter Molyneux while speaking to **games™**. "It's a battle for input one, but I don't think consumers care about input one at all. They're battling over a place that doesn't really exist in our homes like it did when they first started. There's been so much energy spent… there's this in-fighting that, as a consumer, I don't feel like I understand or am a part of."

Molyneux raises a fair point, and it echoes one we have heard from many developers

DATA STREAM → DOUBLE FINE'S MASSIVE CHALICE KICKSTARTER ENDS ON $1.2 MILLION

Contents

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“It's obvious to us that it's going to take a little while before we can get to the full power of those machines”
Dominic Guay, Ubisoft Montreal

“It's like two boxers in the ring. It's very interesting to see the different approaches and strategy”
Stephane Roy, Eidos Montreal

following E3. While there were plenty of games on the show floor that inspired confidence in the next generation, the conversation was swallowed by a PR battle that erupted between the Microsoft and Sony conferences, and that might not be productive in the long run.

"Think about how many great games are at this show," lamented wayward developer Cliff Bleszinski over Twitter. "Now consider how much they're going to spend fighting each other marketing."

The fight between the two behemoths is far from over, and if these early days have shown us anything, it's that the mind games are just beginning. Microsoft spent the entirety of E3 sticking to its guns, refusing to back down from its futurist DRM and connectivity 'solutions' (and we use that term lightly), only to perform a complete 180-degree about turn a week later. Microsoft arguably wasted the most important event on the videogame calendar as we quickly saw indie developers like *Fez*'s Phil Fish taking issue with the Xbox One's now-reversed anti-consumer policies.

"IT'S LIKE TWO boxers in the ring," says *Thief* producer Stephane Roy to **games™** at E3. "It's very interesting to see the different approaches and strategy. I laughed yesterday at a couple of announcements and the clip of how to share a game on PlayStation 4."

Watch Dogs producer Dominic Guay still feels it's early days when it comes to the power of the new hardware. "We're still very much in the R&D period, that's what I call it, because the hardware is still new," Guay told **games™** at E3 2013 after we saw the impressive Ubisoft Montreal game in action. "It's obvious to us that it's going to take a little while before we can get to the full power of those machines and harness everything. But, even now we realise that both of them have comparable power, and for us that's good, but everyday it changes almost. We're pushing it and we're going to continue doing that until [*Watch Dogs*] ship date."

In the months leading up to the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One's release, we can only expect to see more bickering between the companies. On paper the PS4 is shaping up to be the more powerful of the two systems, but with Microsoft boasting the power of the cloud behind them, there really is all to play for when approaching the next generation of gaming.

"Sony has a cloud that streams game video so you can play a game that you don't have on your machine. Now, Xbox Live has a cloud that somehow powers games," says Respawn

Above While the jump to the eighth generation of consoles won't be as drastic as it was between PlayStations 2 and 3, there is still a noticeable leap in graphical fidelity.

“It kind of felt like a playground scrap It's a battle for input one, but I don't think gamers care about input one”
Peter Molyneux, 22 Cans




THE INDIE PERSPECTIVE

Indie developers speak out about next-gen

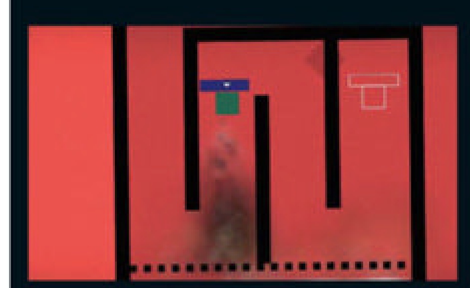


PLAYSTATION 4: THE NEW HOME OF INDIES

DURING ITS E3 conference, Sony reaffirmed its dedication to providing a platform for indie developers, with *Transistor*, *Don't Starve*, *Mercenary Kings*, *Octodad: Deadliest Catch*, *Secret Ponchos*, *Ray's The Dead*, *Outlast*, *Galak-Z* and *Oddworld New 'N' Tasty* all making exclusive console debuts on the PlayStation 4, alongside Jonathan Blow's *The Witness*. "We absolutely love scouring the earth for the most creative and innovative developers," says Sony's Adam Boyles. "Our vision is crystal clear: to continue to lead the console space as the most open and inclusive platform for developers, while providing gamers with an endless variety of beautiful, challenging and fantastic experiences."

XBOX ONE: IT'S NOT ALL NEGATIVE

MICROSOFT DEMANDING PUBLISHER support could be viewed as a positive, with the company eager to impose a quality gate into its platform. One of the only exclusive indie games announced for the Xbox One so far is Capybara Games' *Below*, an exciting new roguelike. "Xbox One really afforded us an opportunity to develop on a platform that fit exactly what we wanted to do with Below," says Nathan Vella speaking on Xbox.com. Clearly, Microsoft cares about indie games, but from the outside looking in, the company's choices of who to work with appear to be very specific, such as Access Games and Swery65 with the release of *D4*. Will quality rather than quantity pay off?



THE DEATH OF INSPIRED DESIGN?

WITH XBOX ONE closing its doors to indies, many developers feel like this will hinder the industry. *Thomas Was Alone* developer Mike Bithell spoke out on Twitter addressing the issues, claiming, "Not that I'll ever sell well enough to make a blip on MS's radar, but somewhere, the next *Minecraft* is being made for another platform." This is a point that we've seen echoed across the spectrum of ex-Xbox developers, with *Fez*'s Phil Fish saying, "Microsoft doesn't care about indie developers" and *Minecraft*'s Notch lamenting "Also, I tried to get excited about the Xbox One, but failed."

SHUTTING OUT INDIE DEVELOPERS

XBOX ONE WILL require independent developers to find an approved publisher before it lets games onto its platform now, which many have taken issue with. Oddworld Inhabitants' Lorne Lanning outlined the issue to Eurogamer saying, "We don't have a publisher so we're not officially on the platform, even though we're compatible, even though we'll be ready to do it." It's a position that many indie developers now seem to share, though it's the sort of issue we could imagine Microsoft budging on after the DRM policies were reversed. It would be the sensible thing to do.

Entertainment's Jon Shiring in a post on *Titanfall*'s website. "This is a really big deal, and it can make online games better!"

FOR US TO find out what's truly in store for next-gen gaming, the talk needs to shift from hardware to software. This is being helped, in part, by developers such as Respawn and Bungie. *Destiny* may have been one of the defining games of E3 2013, but gamers often forget it requires an online connection to function. It's a move that we will likely see many in-development games make, especially as connected experiences are informing how much of the AI in games like *Titanfall*, *Forza* and *Driveclub* all function at a basic level.

"Whether they are DRM or not doesn't actually matter for us because we're taking a leap and saying in order to provide the experience we believe in you'll have to be a connected gamer," says Bungie president Harold Ryan. "What the platform providers do with it at that point is up to them. It won't affect us."

Once other developers adopt a similar approach to their development cycles, it likely won't matter what Sony and Microsoft do with their individual architectures. It will certainly help us avoid seeing unrest from developers such as Team Ninja's Yosuke Hayashi, who was one of the many at E3 that was disappointed to see the conversation circle hardware and policies. "The hardware cycles have been about upping the performance of the hardware, and the presentations this week at E3 seem to be on the same road as that, upping the specs," Hayashi says. "We really hope to see new kinds of experiences on new platforms. It's not just about specs; it's about games themselves and what kind of games people can come up with to run on these platforms."



Below CD Projekt RED may not support DRM practices, but *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* will be making its way to Xbox One, alongside PlayStation 4 and PC.



ATLUS' PARENT COMPANY HAS FILED FOR BANKRUPTCY, PUTTING DRAGON'S CROWN RELEASE IN JEOPARDY

> "We're taking a leap. In order to provide the experience we believe in you'll have to be a connected gamer"
>
> Harold Ryan, Bungie President

This is a thought echoed by Keiji Inafune, who told **games™**, "When the last generation was announced, there was a lot of looking at how we make games look nicer. I don't really feel that pressure right now. I don't think that should be focus right now. It should be about finding new kinds of games with the features that the hardware offers. That's the real challenge for this generation."

Once your feet are on the E3 show floor, away from the 24-hour news cycle, you get an idea of what this generation has to offer. The gulf between single and multiplayer is being bridged, and it has the potential to change how we look at our pastime.

"It doesn't have to be online or offline, single player or multiplayer – it's just one experience," says *Need For Speed: Rivals*' development director Tatyana Dyshlova. It's a thought that is shared by other developers in the racing genre.

"If you've got an internet connection, what we do is read from a massive pull of data based on other people that have played on the same track, people that have driven the same car as you, what times you've set, and look at your social community and say 'what's the appropriate target for you to beat?' We constantly rebalance it to your skill level, so you've always got a target that is appropriate for you," says *Driveclub*'s senior game designer Ben Gouldstone.

WE ARE SEEING this shift across the board. RPGs might be utilising the technology to build bigger worlds, but it's certainly no surprise that we are seeing more MMOs bridge the gap between PC and console. The way we play and interact with content is changing quickly, community is becoming a bigger part of our daily experience. From the DualShock 4's Share button, Xbox One's built-in social network and Twitch TV integration to the overlapping single and multiplayer worlds of *Titanfall* and *Watch Dogs* – next-gen is a podium for social gaming, and the traditional definition of a solo experience will likely be redundant in four months.

"I think this console generation's going to be different in the sense there's going to be massive change and not in the way people are thinking about it," says Denis Dyack speaking with NowGamer. "The opportunities we have here with PS4, Xbox One, Wii U, new PCs, Steam console coming out whenever that's going to come out, those are all really cool. But we think the really interesting change is the social aspect."

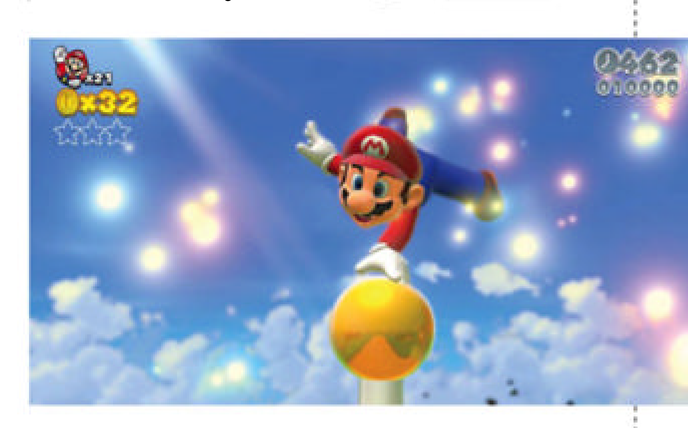
The eighth console generation feels like it has been engineered to create controversy, but in reality 2013 highlights the shifting mind-set of the community and corporations. Cliff Bleszinski puts it best when stepping back up to the Twitter soapbox he loves so much:

"If you're saying the next round of the console war is over before it even started then you're a fucking idiot. This is a multi-year fight," He says, adding, "I still think the future of this industry is going to be a bloodbath. It's going to get ugly with many, many shake-ups."

Between the shifting policies of Microsoft, the spectacle of Sony and the array of information or parse, it's tough to hear the voices through the noise. They are clearly excited though, and not just because of the hardware leap, but because after years of suffering in silence with the limitations of current-gen systems, the opportunity to forge new and exciting experiences has finally re-emerged. Bleszinski has a point, too, of course – anyone who thinks they can call the console war at this point would have to be able to predict the next five or six years of ups and downs, of competitors waiting in the wings with foundation-challenging technology that we can't possibly pre-empt. The lack of predictability is, as ever, a huge part of the fun with hardware generations.

Above Ubisoft is making the jump to next-gen with a healthy line-up. Joining *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* is *Tom Clancy's The Division* and *Watch Dogs*.

Below Ignoring the bickering between Sony and Microsoft, Nintendo continues to do its own thing. The company skipped E3 conferences and unleashed its games through a direct presentation.



HOTLINE MIAMI RETURNS WITH A SEQUEL, MORE OF THE SAME, WHICH ISN'T EXACTLY A BAD THING

(TURNS OUT IT'S MAN)

The Evil Within: Reviving Survival Horror

→ Producer Jason Bergman and Bethesda PR VP Pete Hines on Shinji Mikami's return to true horror

From Bethesda's point of view, why did you want to get into the Shinji Mikami business?
PETE HINES: In general, we are always looking to work with people whose work we respect and whose creativity we respect, who we share common ideals with from a game development standpoint, doing stuff that's new, different or pushing the boundaries, being willing to take chances and folk who are very passionate about what they do. We knew Shinji and his work, and the idea of him creating a pure survival horror game and doing something that was very immersive and involved player choice, taking the genre back to its roots – that was the stuff we at Bethesda identify with.

What kind of state do you think survival horror is in, coming into 2013?
PH: Well, I think the fact that we're saying 'we're taking the genre back to pure survival horror' probably speaks a good bit... I guess we wouldn't be taking it there if we didn't think it wasn't there right now. I think we recognise Shinji's goal in terms of the kind of experience he wants to create and how it cuts in different directions than in other survival horror games in terms of having a bit more action. Lots of guns, lots of ammo, lots of enemies to mow down. That's not where Shinji got his start – I certainly think it's fair to call him the father of survival horror. If you look at some of his best-known work like *Resident Evil* and *Resident Evil 4*, what he and his team did with those games has a lot more in common with *The Evil Within* than some of the other stuff. That's not to say those games are good, bad or indifferent; it's just that they don't focus as much on finding a balance between action and everything else: surviving, running away from stuff, solving puzzles, and the weight that they hold within the game is not on the same level, I think that's fair to say.

You mentioned that the game is structured around a divide between exploration and scripted horror sequences. How does it play out in any given chapter?
JASON BERGMAN: It all depends on the specific level. It's divided into chapters, and each chapter is organised in such a way that everything has to make you scared. It's not going to be all exploration, it's not going to be all horror – they're called Mikami zones, the horror zones – everything is paced very deliberately. When it comes to designing a chapter, Mikami sits down and he plots it all out. That's how it's done.

What were the motivations for making this cross-gen?
PH: You know, we have a basic philosophy at Bethesda, which is we make games for people who like to play games, and we would like for as many people as possible to play the games as we have imagined them. If it means making a lot of sacrifices or cutting to features to make it run on this, that or the other, then we won't do it, because that's not the game





Below The story of *The Evil Within* is a hard one to figure out, it seems.



DON MATTRICK LEAVES MICROSOFT FOR THE CEO POSITION AT ZYNGA AFTER SIX YEARS ON XBOX



we're making. In the case of new consoles coming out, there's going to be a lot of people playing on a lot of different platforms – there's no reason to not have it work on those. There are some things that, where applicable, we can add on next-gen hardware to enhance it even further, but only where they add to the experience and aren't just features for features' sake.

JB: It's also worth mentioning that we're using id Tech 5, and the engine scales exceptionally well, as I'm sure you've seen on various PCs. The engine just runs really well – we could keep throwing stuff at it and it would run.

PH: As we've seen several years ago, id Tech 5, when John Carmack designed it, was meant for where consoles are going next, and so it does nicely align with the hardware that's been revealed and the kind of things that those platforms are looking for in an engine.

In terms of Bethesda's relationship with Tango, how much of a collaboration is it between the two parties, or is Tango very much left to its own devices?

JB: Collaboration is a weird word, because it gives the sense that he's sitting down and we're deciding together what it is. I would say that in a lot of respects, we're a good sounding board for him to bounce his ideas off. And not necessarily just ideas – although there is a lot of that – or stories, characters, creatures or whatever, but it's more 'let's get it in the game and see how it plays.' Shinji and Tango have the ability to send over a build – not just for Jason and me to play, but guys from MachineGames to play, guys from Bethesda to play, guys from id, Arkane, get a chance to play his stuff and send their notes on it. "I didn't understand this" or "I really loved this", that sort of thing. That's not exclusive just to Tango; that's how we work as a publisher.

So you get a little bit of all of your studios across all of your games?

PH: Exactly.

JB: Mikami knows what he's doing, and that's an important thing. We're not here to tell Mikami how to make a game or how to make a survival horror game – I don't think there's anyone more qualified in the world than Mikami.

PH: To have all those studios work independently of each other would be criminally stupid – we do formal meetings where we get different studios together at our offices, and we have producer-level meetings or art-level meetings or whatever. Particularly on id tech, where you've got MachineGames or Tango working on it, there's a collaboration and back and forth there.



Above It's not a soft horror experience, obviously.

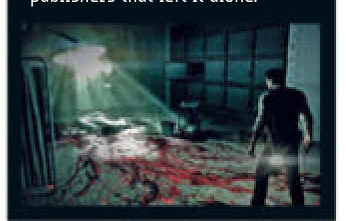
When horror died (sort of)

Where did it go wrong for the scary genre?

THE EVIL WITHIN looks like a proper return to scares for videogames. As the perception of mainstream games has changed over this generation, with certain circles convinced that publishers were targeting mainstream gamers only, survival horror's demise seemed to back up their complaints.

While *Dead Space* showed how the genre could evolve, the second and third entries were more action-oriented, removing the element of surprise and creepy storytelling for cheaper scares.

Yet the success of games like *Amnesia* show that there's still a significant hunger for survival horror experiences that go out of their way to make the players feel on-edge; it's just the big publishers that left it alone.



Below *The Evil Within* represents another promising effort from Mikami.



> "Mikami knows what he's doing. We're not here tell him how to make a survival horror game"
>
> Jason Bergman, producer of The Evil Within

THE PLAYSTATION 4 WAS ORIGINALLY GOING TO SHIP WITH A CAMERA, WAS DROPPED TO KEEP THE PRICE DOWN

(DRINK. RELAX. PLAY.)

ETOO: LONDON'S ALTERNATIVE TO E3

While Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo were busy hawking their wares across the Atlantic at E3, a small gathering of indie devs and gaming enthusiasts gathered in a small bar in London to host an alternative showcase

It might lack the vast floor space that the Los Angeles Convention Centre boasts, but you could hardly criticise London's Loading Bar of being short on creativity. Tucked away in Soho, the gaming-themed bar played host to an alternative industry event during the week of E3 that invited developers and enthusiasts to meet, play and discuss games.

"It was inspired by the fact that I couldn't go to E3!" says journalist Keith Stuart, who organised the event within the short space of just a few weeks. "I found out very late that I wouldn't be able to attend and, although I was secretly quite relieved, I was also a little disappointed that I wouldn't get to spend a week hanging about with friends and colleagues talking about games. I joked on Twitter about setting up a rival indie event in London and within a few seconds the game developer Georg Backer got in touch and said he'd help – then Jimmy who runs the Loading Bar in Soho offered to host it. And then somehow it was real. Our idea was to do a sort of indie gaming get-together – a cross between GameCity and IndieCade – but we also wanted to comment on the big events of E3, so the idea of a nightly live streaming show came up. Basically, we wanted to give gamers in London the chance to experience some of the buzz of a big games event."

150 tickets were put on sale for each of the four days that corresponded with E3, which quickly sold out. Attendees could find developer Big Robot with *Sir, You Are Being Hunted* at one end of the room, while Tom Francis' breakthrough indie hit *Gunpoint* occupied the opposite corner. An Oculus Rift-compatible build of *Strike Suit Zero* enthralled gatherers in a cramped crevice, as New Star Games' Simon Read presented the latest update of the Bafta-winning *New Star Soccer* in the adjacent space.

"I don't really see it as an alternative to E3 but more of a complementary thing," Read tells us when we talk to him the day before the event. "It offers a chance to go and chat about games and it also provides a nice commentary on the main event. It's also a really nice way for indie devs to show off their games in a very cosy environment."

HOWEVER, THE SUCCESS of ETоо wasn't down to its 'niche and obscure' door policy. It netted the support of major publishers, with Sony, Ubisoft, Activision and Sega all participating with playable builds of upcoming titles, while overseas talent travelled cross-country for the opportunity to showcase work.

"The reaction has been overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic," beams Stuart. "Apart from a few grumbles about the place being packed all the time, everyone seemed to really enjoy it. We had developers coming in from Italy and the Netherlands and I was worried it would be a waste of time for them, but they were the most enthusiastic! I think everyone loved the atmosphere of the place – it didn't feel like developers, journalists and members of the general public; it felt like a room filled with people who loved games."

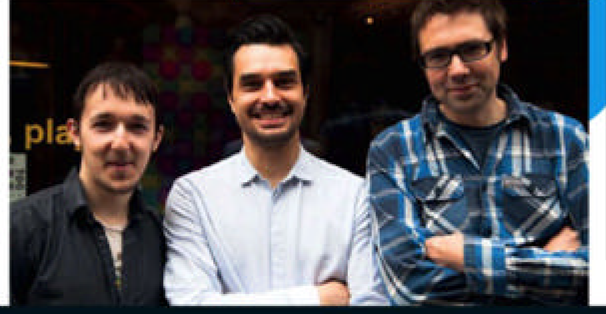
Above Each day boasted different developers, some of whom travelled from far-flung reaches of the world for the opportunity to present their games to consumers.

Indeed, there's a refreshing egalitarian attitude to ETоо; a gathering of familiar and not-so-familiar faces to share insight, help and appreciation in a humble setting in the heart of the capital. Upon arrival we spot *Uncharted* director Richard Lemarchand, who is later joined by Martin Hollis, co-creator of *GoldenEye*. The two stick around for the day, before participating in the evening's live show streamed on YouTube, which Skyped developers at E3, invited guests onto the sofa and even survived being invaded by celebrities in a nightly five-hour broadcast.

But there's a question to be asked whether smaller, more intimate events and, much like Nintendo this year, pre-recorded streamed conferences could prove a more fruitful platform for the industry in the future. "I do see it fragmenting," admits Born Ready Games' Jamin Smith, who attended ETоо with *Strike Suit Zero*. "The industry is in a weird place right now; we've got tablets, iOS, the rise of indie, the resurgence of PC gaming and things like Oculus Rift and the main consoles. Things are going in so many different directions that it's going to get less and less likely that it'll be contained under one roof and be spread across different events."

If that proves the case then ETоо sets an impressive precedent. While it's not likely that the LA Convention Centre will be swapped for smaller venues anytime soon, Stuart confirms that he intends on renewing the show next year: "I'm pretty sure we'll do it again, but I think we'll look into getting a bigger venue. Not too big, but big enough." It's like one developer was overheard saying during the event, "ETоо's company, E3's a crowd."

> "It didn't feel like developers, journalists and the public; it felt like a room filled with people who loved games"
>
> Keith Stuart, ETоо organiser



Below The ETоо organisers from left to right: Jimmy Dance, Georg Backer and Keith Stuart.

→ MICROSOFT REPORTEDLY NO LONGER CHARGING DEVELOPERS FOR UPDATING GAMES ON XBOX LIVE ARCADE

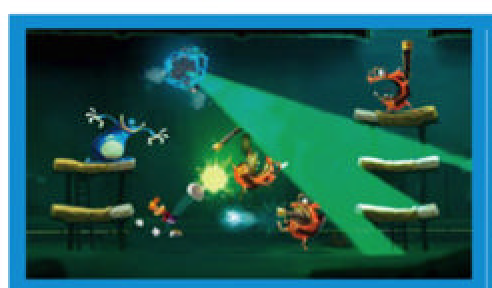


Left The event was co-sponsored by Sony and GameStick, both of which brought along products for attendees to try out.



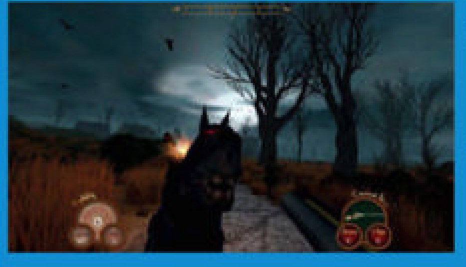
ETOO: The highlights

The best titles that appeared during ETOO



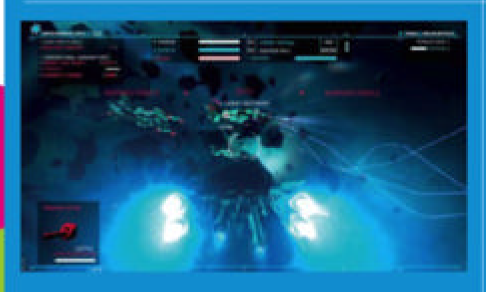
Rayman: Legends

Ubisoft shared its E3 demo with the crowd at ETOO, which enabled players to dive into a small portion of the quirky platformer. There was also the unveiling of Foot mode; essentially a football mini-game, but the twist is you can kick each other as well as the ball.



Sir, You Are Being Hunted

After a successful Kickstarter campaign ETOO offered Big Robot the opportunity for players to get hands-on with *Sir, You Are Being Hunted*. The tweed-punk open-world title casts you as a lone survivor evading the clutches of the human-hunting robots that roam the land.



Strike Suit Zero

Strike Suit Zero was released a few months back (receiving a 6 in **games™** 133) but Born Ready Games attended ETOO with an Oculus Rift build of the title. Upping the level of immersion, Oculus Rift enhances the space-roaming flight sim enormously.



Caromble

We've seen plenty of modern interpretations of *Breakout* but *Caromble* is perhaps the first time the concept has been truly modernised. While retaining the traditional sliding barrier-bat and destructive bouncing ball, *Caromble* transforms the world into 3D.

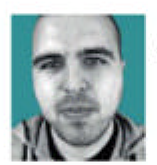
XBOX ONE'S KINECT DEVICE WON'T WORK WITH YOUR PC – YOU'LL NEED TO BUY A SEPARATE UNIT

#TRENDING

with NowGamer.com's Ryan King



The Second-Hand Problem



Your voice was heard. After blitzing Microsoft's Xbox Facebook page, spreading #NoDRM hashtags on Twitter, pre-ordering PS4 in droves and continued pressure from all corners of the media that spread as far as *Late Night With Jimmy Fallon*, Microsoft heard the noise and pulled a stunning U-turn on its controversial Xbox One policies. You can do what you want with used games, as they'll will work as they do on Xbox 360. Always online has changed from every 24 hours to having to be online when setting up the console and never again. Xbox One no longer has region locking.

Almost immediately afterwards, publishers and high-profile developers sprung up to defend what Microsoft attempted. Adrian Chmielarz (The Astronauts founder), Justin Boswell (lead programmer at Firaxis) and Cliff Bleszinski (somewhere) are some of those who have spoken up in favour of the controversial policies. Their argument goes something like this. When we buy used games, all the money from that sale goes to Game or CEX or whoever sold it, and not to those who created the game. The gaming industry needs as many sales as it can get because development costs are rising. *Tomb Raider* has become the accidental posterchild for this line of thinking - it sold 3.4 million copies in its first month and was considered a failure, as Square-Enix had projected double those sales in that period.

That, obviously, is utterly ridiculous. Selling 3.4 million copies in the first month is a staggering achievement, not a failure (similarly, *The Last Of Us* grossed more than *Man Of Steel* in its opening weekend). Publishers are demanding impossible sales figures to justify eye-watering budgets. It's the model that's broken, not us. We didn't ask for development teams nearing 1,000 in size. We didn't ask for Hollywood actors to be brought in for voice-acting and motion-capture. We didn't ask for tacked-on multiplayer. Cutting off used games allows the games industry to carry on its unsustainable model of bloat at the expense of consumer choice. What lesson would the games industry learn from that? Other industries and media survive the presence of a second-hand market. Why can't ours?

> Tomb Raider sold 3.4 million copies in its first month and was considered a failure

Two things to think about. *Call Of Duty*'s success on console has been the siren on the rocks for most publishers, who have tried emulating its model of frequent sequels built on top of massive advertising campaigns with mixed results. *Call Of Duty* is a member of an elite club that can pull it off, along with *FIFA* and possibly *Assassin's Creed*. But those games are the exception, not the rule. The success stories have been in recent times are *Minecraft*, *League Of Legends*, *Wii Sports*, *Angry Birds*, *DayZ*, *Temple Run* and *Farmville*. You can attribute their success to a number of individual factors but what they prove is success in the games industry *is* possible without having to burn warchest funds on developing three million graphics and advertising campaigns designed to dwarf the competition.

Ideally the industry would recalibrate itself to cater to the smaller indie titles that don't rely on pre-order bonuses or microtransactions or season passes, titles can and should flourish alongside the triple-A big budget blockbusters. Whether they achieve that will depend on our capacity and willingness to support those smaller games.

But this brings me to my second point. Games are too expensive, which is what enables the second-hand market to thrive. Steam is a success because it has plenty of sales. Mobile gaming is a success because you can buy games that look or sound interesting without hurting your wallet. When *Shooty McShoot: Death Of Men* has yet another sequel within a year without any meaningful or interesting advances, why should we be expected to pay full price for it? What's the cumulative effect of someone being burned once too often on uninspired sequels?

I know we're not living in a magical dreamland where triple-A games can be sold for pennies on day of release but nor are we living in a magical dreamland where eliminating used games cures all the industry's ills. Microsoft's reversal shows we have the power to shape the future as the industry answers to its audience, not the other way round. The onus is on the games industry to figure out how to survive and not how to bully us into sustaining a broken model that's failing great games like *Tomb Raider*.

Ryan King is editor of NowGamer.com

PlayStation 4 vs. Xbox One

If there's something we've learnt in the short time since Microsoft and Sony have unwrapped their upcoming consoles it's that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of a few. Xbox One changed its stance on DRM and second-hand sales in light of vociferous criticism, making the anointment of PlayStation 4 as the people's champion seem slightly premature. We ask the **games™** readership to discuss the next-generation of console hardware and how the recent announcements have affected their purchasing decision.

The ever-present 'all-seeing eye' of Xbox One concerns me greatly (very 1984, eh Microsoft?). Of all the recent information gamers have kicked up a fuss about, it's a bit worrying that this feature has rung fewer alarm bells than the more frivolous ones. As for PS4, it looks like they [Sony] finally grasped that the idea of overpricing is a bad one. Far too many of the launch window titles for both machines are sequels to last gen series, which are mostly up scaled ports, hardly the best showcase for 'new' systems. I was neutral about jumping onboard with the next generation of consoles and after everything I've read I still am.
Pious the chosen, games™ forum

Don't trust MS with DRM. Don't want a gimmicky camera for £100 extra. Just want a games console.
@RobPelwenkhan, Twitter

I think Microsoft were trying to making a true next-gen console, however the way they went about explaining what they were attempting to do may haunt them for years. Personally, I still believe that in years to come, the Xbox One will still have the most to offer.
Mike Barfoot, Facebook

Both machines will offer fantastic gaming platforms, the only differences will be what extra bells and whistles suit you more. I for one have way too much invested in Xbox to change platform and if I'm honest I probably would have plumped for the Xbox One anyhow as none of the issues that everyone went postal about bothered me.
Mr Marvellous, games™ forum

Going from PS2 to Xbox 360 (and being an adult in all that time of ownership) I hold no particular allegiance to either brand. If you're going to be laying out in the region of £500 you owe it to yourself to ensure you make the right choice for you. It's unlikely that either console will hit a good stride of releases within the first year, and plenty of games will still release on the last gen. People are so ready to lay down money before they're out, when in reality you can put that money down any time.
Jimi May, Facebook

If PS4 = Tyrion then Xbox One = Joffrey.
@Oldgitgamers, Twitter

Microsoft seems to have well and truly shot themselves in the foot with their prelaunch behaviour. I'm probably one of many people who were dead set on the Xbox One, but are now undecided.
Steve Mann, Facebook

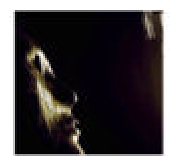


COAST TO COAST

with Gray Nicholson



Remembering a time when a games console really was just a games console



Remember when you had to chase a car filled with men who were shooting at you, but who you couldn't kill? For no reason, you had to do this in an unwieldy and delicate limousine. After the city-spanning chase, there was a 30-minute gun fight with gangsters at an excruciating, life-preserving pace, before wrestling a flighty motorbike across wet, rock-studded sand at night, with a tight time limit and the water to one side, constantly threatening failure. Then you'd jump from the motorbike into a helicopter, which you'd use to chase a speedboat (armed with missiles) to another gunfight, a foot chase, and a last one-on-one shootout.

This unreasonable chain of events, linked by so many opportunities for catastrophe, was the last mission in *GTA IV*, a victim both of the game's sparse checkpoint system and its non-regenerating health. It took me five years to do. Not trying constantly, you understand, but every now and then, as it built a kind of performance anxiety. Lining up that motorbike jump incorrectly, or getting shot down in the chopper, meant a laborious do-over, and became all the more likely for it. Now, with *GTA V* looming, completion became more pressing, a point of pride, and I vowed not to turn off until it was done.

■ Rockstar's take on New York has only been surpassed by its own open-world efforts.

"In building this enormous, grubby playground, Rockstar also engineered a rare emotional involvement: finishing was sad. I didn't want to be done"

Finishing was one thing; leaving, quite another. Like walking out of an apartment for the last time, memories replaying as you cast an eye over each room on the final sweep, I was reluctant to close the door on *GTA IV*.

As the credits rolled – credits it had seemed I might never see – fly-over views of the city filled me with interest. Looking down on it all, it was so vast – *too* vast – unknowable, every nook calling out for exploration.

Rockstar was always so good at cities, we know. Years later we would still see crude city sets in games from other developers, such as those in the *Deus Ex* series; cardboardy and stiff, split up into unlikely zones of two and three streets, no one moving from their assigned spots, everything closed in and strangely obstructive. In *GTA's* clones were streets that were artificial, too clean, lifeless.

In building this enormous, grubby playground, Rockstar also engineered a rare emotional involvement: finishing was sad. I didn't want to be done.

This wasn't a bond with a story or character. Gameplay and design easily outdid Rockstar's efforts there, despite dramatic performances well above the norm. With so much sandboxing between missions, I couldn't really tell you the story, beyond that Niko was an immigrant willing to do violent things, and the only nice girl he met was killed. It was the world that I was attached to; how it looked and felt, the citizens, their reactions, and the unpredictability and chaos that followed mischief in Liberty City.

Yet, it's safe to say, completion was overdue. Though still impressive with its condensing breath and dirty brake discs, *GTA IV* exists in another era. It predates Obama and tablet computers; its city is dotted with internet cafes! Radio-ad parodies joke about the absurd intrusion of being contactable anywhere by email on your phone.

Still, the city, the sense of waste in leaving it behind when it remains the best we've got, the feeling of potential still inside, fun yet to be wrung out, eventually won. I started touring the undiscovered stunt jumps, taking me to parts all over the map; a kind of geographical Greatest Hits. Then, why not, meeting the last crazed individuals who show up as little peg men on your radar, helping them out in their dismal lives. That done, well, nothing wrong with hunting those inconspicuous collectible pigeons; dozens of them, bringing me deeper into obscure back alleys and dingy corners, spiralling off into those invigorating, chaotic chases when something goes awry. Maybe, like other great towns, Liberty City will just always possess something that beckons me back.

Gray Nicholson is a former videogames journalist who now resides in America, acknowledging his roots as he sees fit



Ouya: The Underdog Launches

→ The divisive console is finally released worldwide

We are really challenging the status quo," said Julie Uhrman, CEO of Ouya, when we spoke to her during the console's Kickstarter campaign last year and it's still hard to argue with that statement. The merits of the '$99 console' stretch far beyond its budget price tag, boasting a staggering amount of content that includes 170 games (all of which implement a free-to-try component), a slew of media apps and the promise of thousands of developers working on new titles.

Early word on the Android-based console ranges from cautiously optimistic to damning – complaints have mostly been targeted at the quality of construction and its lack of killer apps. But it's early days for the fledgling hardware and there's no denying the potential of a low-priced home console that offers a raft of imaginative indie delights to have huge scope in today's volatile marketplace. We'll be reviewing the system in the next issue of **games™**.



WHY I ♥...

ToeJam & Earl

DAVE OSBORNE, JAGEX, SENIOR NARRATIVE DESIGNER

“I used to play ToeJam & Earl with my brother, and we’d play it like a game of pass-the-parcel: taking turns, opening the power-ups that were dropped in the game world as presents. They were random, each one containing an upgrade or a punishment, but the awesomeness didn’t come from the lucky dip of items, it came from the ‘randomiser’ power-up that would shuffle the contents of the presents, forcing us to start all over again. Whoever opened the randomiser got a thump in the arm, jumped off the edge of the game world, and sheepishly walked through the previous level. Then the pass-the-parcel game started again. In hindsight, it’s unsurprising that we never got to the last level.”

> “I used to play ToeJam & Earl with my brother, and we’d play it like a game of pass-the-parcel”
>
> **DAVE OSBORNE, JAGEX**



WorldMags.net


NEXT GEN BEGINS
24 PlayStation 4
34 Xbox One
46 Wii U
60 Multi-platform
72 Handheld
82 Current-Gen
SONY
PS4

PS4 SONY'S BACK ON TOP

Flying in the face of Microsoft's initial views on DRM, second-hand sales and price, Sony has been steadfast in establishing the gamer at the forefront of its next-gen ambitions. More so than Microsoft and even Nintendo, Sony has proven a keen awareness of its audience's desires, heralding PlayStation 4 as the console of the people



Would PlayStation 4 have received such a rapturous reception were it not for Microsoft's divisive, forward-looking perspective on the industry? The truth is probably not. It was a case of Sony maintaining the status quo, standing back while Microsoft persisted in clumsily stumbling its way through an endless PR minefield that ended somewhat unfavourably for the company. Talk of always-online, second-hand sales and user ownership spread discontent and misinformation across media channels worldwide, leaving Sony to just twist the knife further by stating how it would eschew such draconian restrictions and return user ownership back to the user. By all accounts, Sony was declared the winner of a war – a war that hadn't even begun yet.

The question now is whether PlayStation 4 can maintain its trajectory as the populist platform, which in light of recent events won't be so easy. No sooner had the dust settled from Sony's triumphant E3 showcase, Microsoft declared a U-turn in policy, backing down on its stance towards the aforementioned divisive business strategies that the Xbox One will implement. Suddenly the gulf separating the two next-gen platforms had narrowed to a margin in the eyes of the majority of consumers, and at this point the argument over hardware dominance could easily just fall back to whether you prefer your black box with a side order of *Halo* or *Killzone*.

But Sony's mandate for the next seven-or-so years of the PlayStation 4's lifecycle has grander aspirations beyond a reliance on existing technological freedoms. In many ways Sony has found a palatable balance between the needs of its existing user base and with those of the evolving tastes of a broader target market. Speaking to **games™** earlier in the year, Peter Molyneux predicted (no doubt with some insider knowledge from his time at Microsoft) that the next-generation would be a battle

fought for ubiquitous home entertainment ownership. "I tell you the thing that everyone is obsessed about in hardware terms and it's input one on the TV. There is this stat that came out (and I can't remember the exact stat), that there is going to be ten billion [dollars] spent on what is the new input one on the television. So everyone is fighting for it rather than being your Sky box or your direct aerial, it could be an Xbox or PlayStation."

While the PlayStation 4 doesn't converge your television provider's service through the console like Xbox One (which overlays its own TV guide within the Xbox One interface), it does have a head start when it comes to providing original and, perhaps more importantly, exclusive content. Sony has been operating successful TV and film divisions for decades, boasting award-garnering standout programming such as *Breaking Bad*, *Community* and *Justified*, while its film arm owns heavyweight Hollywood franchises *Spider-Man*, *James Bond* and *Men In Black*. While the company has yet to divulge specific plans, there's little doubt that with its financial clout and proven track record that it has every opportunity to provide credible programming that extends beyond the tastes of hardcore gamers looking for a live-action adaptation of a popular shooter.

And that's not to mention the raft of on-demand video, music and game streaming services that it plans to bolster over the next couple of years. The PlayStation brand has always been synonymous with the proliferation of emerging technology – with both PS2 and PS3 boasting a DVD and Blu-ray drive respectively – and there's little doubt that Sony plans on investing heavily in online services that provide both an efficient and enticing consumer experience.

Convenience is key it seems and in that regard Sony is way ahead of the curve. Having stumped up $380 million to acquire Gaikai, Sony's investment in Dave Perry's cloud-based streaming service might prove the company's true trump card when the extent of its functionality is fully unveiled. We're told that it'll provide a catalogue of PSone, PS2 and PS3 titles available to stream from 2014, and it'd be wise of Sony to either offer access to this directory as either part of an existing PS Plus subscription or a higher monetary tier; a Netflix-style structure as an alternative to charging for individual access, which would avoid the usual consumers complaints targeted at paying for titles more than once.

"THERE'S LITTLE DOUBT THAT SONY PLANS ON INVESTING HEAVILY IN ONLINE SERVICES THAT PROVIDE AN ENTICING EXPERIENCE"

There's also remote play, a feature that already exists in limited capacity on PS3, now set to play more of a major role on the new hardware. Sony has guaranteed that the majority of PS4 titles will be compatible with remote play via PS Vita (with *Just Dance* and its ilk being the understandable exception), which is both an astonishing feature for the PS4 and a massive boon for Sony's underappreciated handheld. It promotes a promising unity across its two gaming devices that doesn't feel shoehorned, genuinely benefitting the audience for both systems.

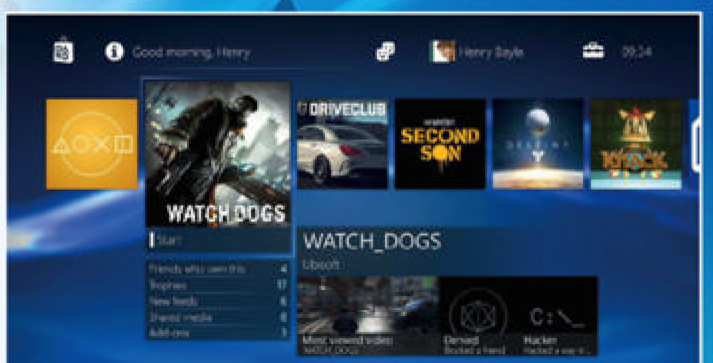
Of course, this amounts to not a great deal at all if it were not for the quality games that'll debut on PS4. Microsoft has put its money where its mouth is in that regard; with Phil Harrison stating that $1 billion is being spent on Xbox One titles – netting Respawn Entertainment's *Titanfall* and Capcom's *Dead Rising 3* as platform exclusives. Sony's portfolio looks conservative in comparison, relying on both a litany of recognisable first-party brands and developers to win over the crowd. As of yet there doesn't appear to be a discernible system-seller among the crop, with even its most prominent franchise recurrence, *Killzone: Shadow Fall*, lacking the mainstream punch of a new *Uncharted*, *God Of War* or even *LittleBigPlanet*. Even the two new IPs to have debuted to date, *The Order: 1886* and *Deep Down*, have yet to muster much enthusiasm from consumers. However,

● The casing of PlayStation 4 closely resembles the angular design of the PS2.

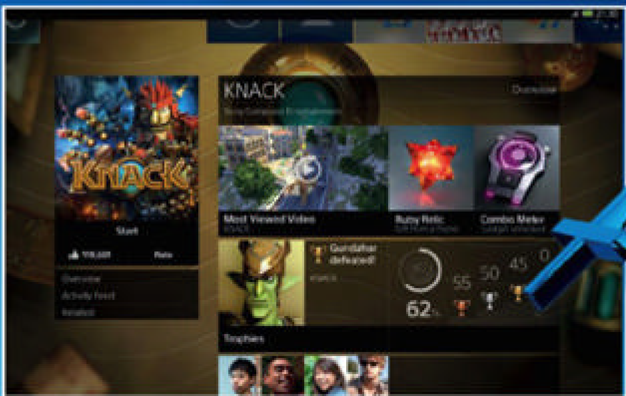
● With Microsoft now back-peddling on its approach to DRM and second-hand sales, Sony will have a tougher fight in the months ahead.

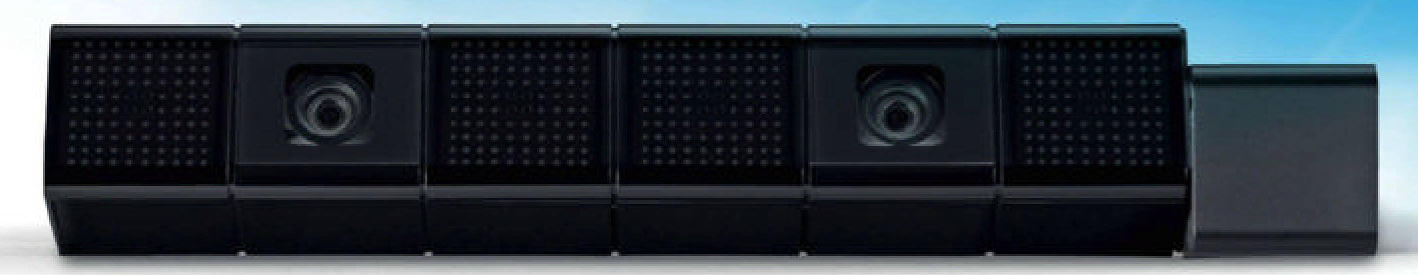


● One of the mistakes of the PS3 that Sony has learnt from is providing a robust online service from day one of the console's launch.



● Video sharing and live gameplay spectating demonstrate how Sony is embracing emerging trends in social interactivity.





the three biggest studios under Sony's belt have remained conspicuously quiet. No doubt at least one of the projects currently been cooked up by Naughty Dog, Sony Santa Monica and Media Molecule will be revealed in the following months.

Sony has also lowered its barriers for indie developers on PS4. In contrast to Xbox One, PS4 enables independent studios to self-publish on the platform, making it the predominant console for alternative, creatively rich titles. *Transistor* from *Bastion* creator Supergiant Games, Switchblade Monkeys' *Secret Ponchos* and *Galak-Z* from 17-bit were just a few announced to be making their debut on the console, while other indie devs have already pledged support to the system. *Fez* creator Phil Fish spoke candidly to Polygon of the restrictions imposed by Microsoft on indies: "Whether or not I would develop for it comes down to how the platform holder treats me. With Microsoft they've made it painfully clear they don't want my ilk on their platform. I can't even self-publish there. Whereas on PS4, I can. It's that simple. Microsoft won't let me develop for their console. But Sony will."

There's also a smarter eye on emerging business models that further differentiates Sony from Microsoft. The importance of free-to-play cannot be overstated in the next-generation and the two consoles have already adopted distinct approaches to the trend. Microsoft's opening salvo is the uninspiring return of *Killer Instinct*, which offers Jago as a free character and charges a premium if you wish to unlock more – which will no doubt overwhelm servers with interminable Jago vs. Jago battles. An elegant solution is staring the company in the face: why not adopt *League Of Legends*' model of rotating free characters to enable players to find a character best suited to their playstyle? It's that pragmatic mentality that benefitted Sony when developing *PlanetSide 2*, offering vanity and convenience items without hampering other players' enjoyment. Continuing this approach when *PlanetSide 2* arrives on PlayStation 4 will convince hesitant console users of the business model's merits, without imposing frustrating restrictions.

It's clear that PlayStation 4 has learnt from the mistakes of its predecessor. Its launch window will be within weeks of the Xbox One, its competitive price is nearly £100 less than its rival (and £75 less than the PS3 when it launched) and its invested heavily in establishing a robust online service (inevitable when paired with the announcement of a fee to play online). Sony may have a solid advantage over Microsoft, not least when it comes down to consumer perception and it's abundantly clear that the PlayStation 4 is doing something right – there's no other reason why it would elicit such a strong reception from the community and such a radical response from its competitor. Maintaining that strong pre-release traction over the next few months leading to launch will be essential (and word is that Gamescom will reveal more surprises for the system) and its greatest asset will prove to be how it presents its attitude to the next-gen that distinguishes itself from Xbox One.

"SONY HAS A SOLID ADVANTAGE OVER MICROSOFT, NOT LEAST WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO CONSUMER PERCEPTION"

● Unlike Kinect, the PlayStation 4 Eye is not compulsory with the new system, which will no doubt please the more paranoid members of the gaming community.



● The console is expected to launch 13 November if leaked European retailer listings are to be believed.

INSIGHT
The original *Shadow Fall* demo runs on 4GB of the console's 8GB memory. Guerrilla was unaware of the hardware's exact specifications until the announcement event.

Publisher: Guerrilla Games **Developer:** Sony **Origin:** Netherlands **Release Date:** November

KILLZONE: SHADOW FALL

The system seller Sony needs?



The next generation of videogames may have only just been revealed, but we are already burdening pretty high expectations. After eight years of first-person shooters falling back on the of *Modern Warfare*'s brown colour palette, the shift to brighter sci-fi locales is welcome.

"We realised that graphically, *Killzone* has always been at the forefront, right? But gameplay-wise, we still need to learn a lot," reveals lead designer Eric Boltjes. "We still need to improve. That's why we want to become better at gameplay and making cool experiences."

Shifting the battle from the frontlines to deep behind enemy lines, *Shadow Fall* is distancing itself from what's come before, enough to renew interest in a series that, honestly, has rarely excited us creatively. Set 30 years after the events of *Killzone 3*, the Helghast are scattered, taking refuge on Vekta – and after sitting in the shadows for 30 years the faction is ready to reclaim land.

"We wanted to focus more on gameplay experience. Before it was really story focused, we wanted to focus on the story. Now it's much more about tackling problems, the way you want to kill the enemy. The technology does help though. Having the technology to drive those kind of view ranges and those kind of sizes of the levels, that does help."

"*Killzone 2* and *3* were quite linear. They were from A to B to C. Now what we want to do is say go hey, there's an A and B and C but if you want to do C first and A later, do it, you know? It's up to you," says Boltjes, adding. "But we're not open world, right? We're not *Borderlands* or anything like that."

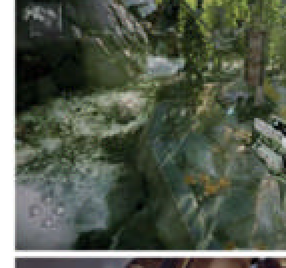
Considering Guerrilla's renewed focus on gameplay, it's surprising to discover that *Shadow Fall* handles pretty much as you'd expect. Obviously, we're getting hands on with a "pre-pre-alpha" build of the game, and there is certainly plenty of scope for the game to evolve in the months leading to its November release.

While the weapon handling is fresh, albeit familiar, the pace of *Killzone* has shifted. Your character now has a range of abilities to help turn the tide of battle; hitting left on the D-Pad gears your assault rifle for long-range combat while hitting down temporarily slows down time. It presents an interesting paradigm shift, especially when you combine these powers with the OWL combat drone that shadows your movements.

> **"WE REALISED THAT GRAPHICALLY, KILLZONE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT, RIGHT? BUT GAMEPLAY-WISE, WE STILL NEED TO LEARN A LOT"**
> Lead designer, Eric Boltjes

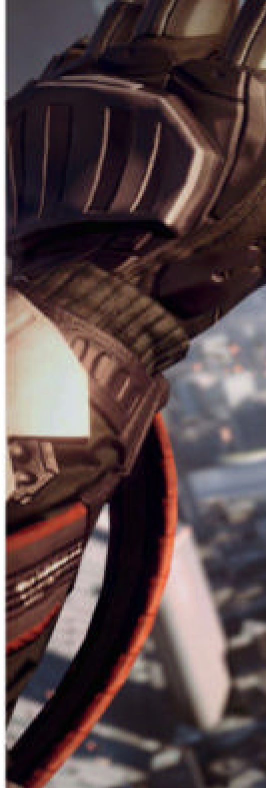
Providing combat and defence support, the OWL can be controlled with the DualShock 4's touchpad with ease. Swiping left, for example, will activate a cover fire mode, whilst swiping down will drop a shield for some split-second cover. It's empowering, but at no point did we ever feel like a one-man army; there's no Master Chief here reporting for duty in the fight against the Helghast.

Sony is still riding on the waves of goodwill following the DRM back-and-forth that gamers saw with Microsoft following E3. The PlayStation 4 needs a system seller, and despite being a little disappointed after our first hands-on, it's easy to see the potential. The core moment-to-moment gameplay is a significant step-up over previous *Killzone* titles; it just isn't the leap we were expecting from next-gen systems and the fictional universe still switches us off.



Killzone has always traded in spectacle, and *Killzone: Shadow Fall* certainly doesn't disappoint in that regard. The maps are expansive, designed to let combat unfold across multiple paths and verticalities; you even come equipped with a zip line that can be activated at any time allowing for swift traversal of environments. The enemy AI is more responsive; pushing against you and your drone compatriot harder than a *Killzone* ever has before.

Killzone: Shadow Fall is coming together almost entirely as you'd expect, and for a new boundary-pushing generation of consoles that's not necessarily a good thing. For *Killzone* fans, this once again demonstrates the technical potential of a PlayStation system, but for the rest of us, Guerrilla still has a bit of work to do before we believe *Shadow Fall* can stand as the next-gen driving force Sony needs it to be.





Killzone: Shadow Fall is doing a great job of selling the PlayStation 4's graphical power. The shinier sci-fi setting is visually impressive.

Powered By Technology

NEW HARDWARE always brings a host of technical and graphical enhancements, but lead designer Eric Boltjes is excited about what the PlayStation 4 will bring in terms of memory, even if it is only utilising 4GB of the system's 8GB of GDDR5 RAM available. "You could only do three enemy types or two weapons [before] because of less memory. Now we're much more free. In the final version, this will have six or seven different enemy types, 12 different weapon types, longer view distances so we can create different types of combat experiences over long distance. Before it was all short to medium distance. So it's just a lot more tools at your disposal as a game designer, right? I can create different experiences just by having more tools."

Killzone's core gameplay has remained relatively unchanged; the guns still feel weighty, the sound design is fierce and array of ways to kill is impressive in itself.

Second Son isn't a reboot of *InFamous* as such, but it's likely to pick up a few new fans off the back of its impressive E3 reveal. The quality of Delsin's animation is particularly impressive.

Publisher: Sony **Developer:** Sucker Punch Productions **Origin:** US **Release Date:** Q1 2014

INFAMOUS: SECOND SON

Behold: the PlayStation 4's most promising game

Of the PlayStation 4 titles we saw (and in many cases, played) at E3, *InFamous: Second Son* was among those titles that were closest to our personal visions of what the next generation should look like. While the version of Seattle we see in this continuation of the PS3 franchise is apparently on a similar scale as New Marais from *InFamous 2*, it's exponentially increased in detail.

"With *Second Son*, we started this project about two years ago, and we had the opportunity to make a next-gen open world game," game designer Darren Bridges tells us. "And we knew we wanted to set it in the *InFamous* universe, but we wanted to make a new story."

Hence, we're introduced to 24-year-old Delsin Rowe, played by the omnipresent Troy Baker, a hat-wearing miscreant who is one pair of hipster glasses away from being a Fred Armisen *Portlandia* caricature. All is forgiven, though – while there seems to be a source of conflict with his brother, he at least seems to enjoy his superpowers, which are spectacularly well-animated on PS4 in the way he can quickly shift across the environment.

"We want it to feel grounded and relatable," Bridges explains. "A lot of what makes the game resonate with people is you run around the city and it feels like a city you live in. And then, when you add the spectacular things, like superpowers, it grounds the whole thing."

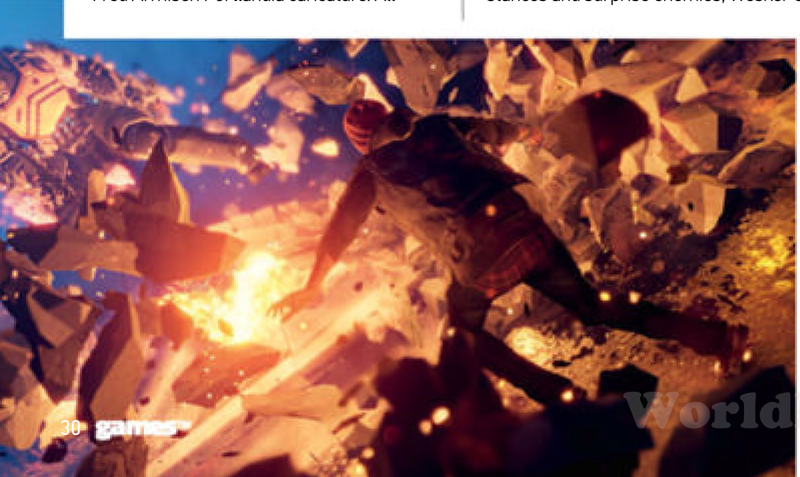
Huge parts of the environment, those representing occupation by the antagonistic DUP, including bridges and outposts, can all be destroyed by Delsin. This protagonist can absorb the powers of other superheroes, a little like Peter Petrelli in *Heroes* – the first set of abilities seen at E3 show Delsin being able to turn into and manipulate smoke, allowing him to instantly switch between combat stances and surprise enemies, Wesker-style.

"We want to make a game about superpowers, but we also want to make a game about consequences. So the choices that the player makes and that Delsin makes in the game will affect how his powers will develop and his relationships with those closest to him, his family and friends, and the fate of the city itself."

Choice was always binary in *InFamous* – we ask Bridges if that's the case here. "We're still developing it. We want to really focus on consequences and relationships. One more thing with the next-gen hardware, we're much more able to capture the actors' performances. You saw in the cutscenes earlier you can really see the nuance in their faces, so we have a real opportunity to immerse the player into the character."

We're not exactly flush with quality superhero simulators on consoles outside of *Batman*, but technically *InFamous* looks like it could set the standard for open world games on the upcoming consoles.

"THE CHOICES THAT THE PLAYER MAKES AND THAT DELSIN MAKES IN THE GAME WILL AFFECT HOW HIS POWERS WILL DEVELOP"
Darren Bridges, Sucker Punch







Filled with fog and supernatural enemies, the streets of London look to be in a sorry state. No word on when we will get a chance to clean them up, it seems *The Order* is still a way off.

Publisher: Sony **Developer:** Ready At Dawn **Origin:** USA **Release Date:** TBA

THE ORDER: 1886

PS4's first new IP revealed

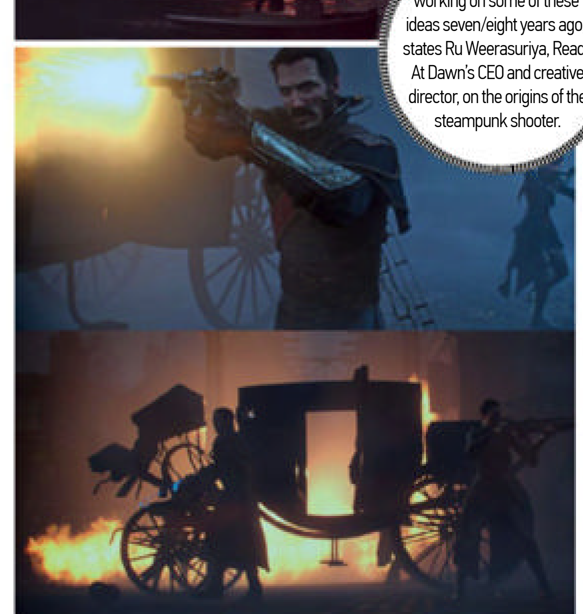


We've been eagerly anticipating the latest title from Sony Santa Monica ever since the assertion came that the developer would be leaving behind the *God Of War* franchise for a new IP. One of the bigger surprises coming out of Sony's PlayStation 4 conference then, was the reveal of *The Order: 1886*.

An exclusive, *The Order* is being co-developed by Ready At Dawn and Sony Santa Monica. Barely anything is known about the game, but the trailer reveals a world quite unlike anything either developer has created before. Imagine if the industrial revolution had come about earlier in history, in an effort to wage a counter-attack against an ancient evil and we'll be on the same page with *The Order*.

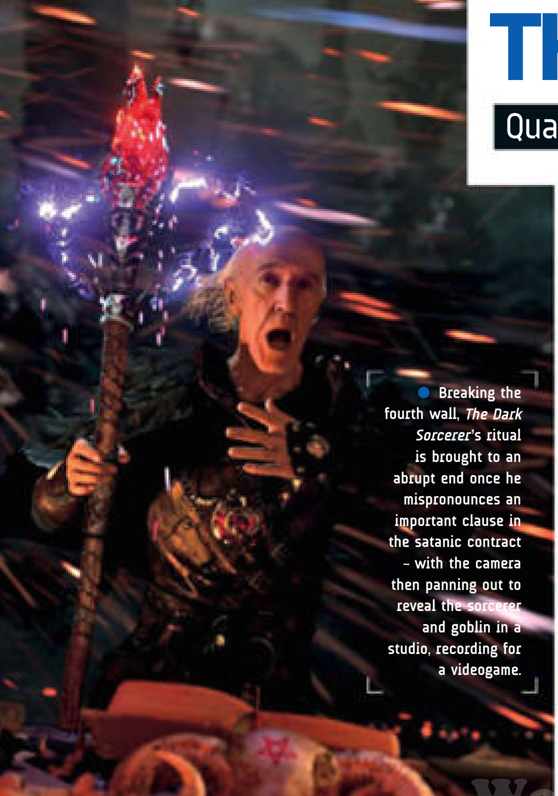
Taking to the streets of Victorian-era England, *The Order* is channelling a strong steampunk vibe through its debut. With zeppelins floating through the skyline, horse and carriages lining the streets and street cops wielding powerful energy weapons, this is a world we want to explore.

It will be a while before Sony is ready to release more information, but the developer has revealed it'll be a story-driven third-person shooter, a 'filmic experience', apparently – with the trailer alluding to co-operative elements throughout. If a shooter with a host of otherworldly enemies to kill sounds up your street, then *The Order: 1886* should be one to keep a close eye on as we approach the PS4's release, but hopefully there's a lot more to its design that is yet to be revealed.



QUOTE

"We were working on some of these ideas seven/eight years ago," states Ru Weerasuriya, Ready At Dawn's CEO and creative director, on the origins of the steampunk shooter.



Breaking the fourth wall, *The Dark Sorcerer*'s ritual is brought to an abrupt end once he mispronounces an important clause in the satanic contract – with the camera then panning out to reveal the sorcerer and goblin in a studio, recording for a videogame.

Publisher: Sony **Developer:** Quantic Dream **Origin:** France **Release Date:** N/A

THE DARK SORCERER

Quantic Dream's newest tech demo oddity

While Sony seems to have emerged from E3 with much of the hardcore community behind it, it's still difficult to parse what the company's true intentions are. A confusing medley of entertainment promises and jabs at competitors aside, Sony's conference was light on games – especially when held up against the Xbox One's strong showing.

Thankfully, Quantic Dream were on hand to demonstrate something we've only heard bellowed from the PR machine – that the graphical power of the PlayStation 4 is quite unlike anything we've witnessed before.

The Dark Sorcerer sees the return of the old man, previously shown in David Cage's emotion technology demonstration from the PlayStation 4 reveal. He's now graduated from an impressively detailed, albeit creepy, revolving head to a full bodied sorcerer. The tech demo picks up with the sorcerer, voiced by *Braveheart*'s David Gant, in the midst of an ancient ritual; particles illuminate the room and flames swirl with ferocity as his wispy white hair flows behind him.

From the bizarrely detailed faces to the impressive particle effects, Quantic Dream seems to have a good handle on the PlayStation 4. While Sony was quick to assure us the twelve-minute demo was just that, a tech demo, this reveal echoes what lengths the French studio has gone to in the past to unveil its latest title.

Quantic Dream's tech demos often pave the way for the studio's next project. *Heavy Rain* was proceeded by *The Casting* demonstration, while *Project Kara* eventually laid the foundation for upcoming *Beyond: Two Souls*. Whether this means Quantic Dream's already in-development PlayStation 4 game is about a rookie sorcerer and a disgruntled goblin isn't clear, either way, whatever this technology is used on is going to look pretty incredible.

NEXT GEN BEGINS

DriveClub handles itself well on the track, though players should expect a learning curve. It's easy to lose control of your car around corners; we expect racing lines to be very useful following *DriveClub*'s release.

Publisher: Sony **Developer:** Evolution Studios **Origin:** UK **Release Date:** Q4 2013

DRIVECLUB

Introducing the next generation of racing

Publisher: Square Enix **Developer:** In-house **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** TBA

FINAL FANTASY XV

The long-dormant spin-off is reborn (at last)

Against all odds, *Final Fantasy Versus XIII* re-emerged at E3 2013. Seven years since it was announced and we've heard barely a whisper from Square Enix on the project. But it's finally popped up again, boasting a new name, shedding its PlayStation exclusivity and hopefully actually coming out this time.

Versus has transformed into *Final Fantasy XV*, and while it is unknown whether it is severing its ties to the *Fabula Nova Crystallis* mythology, the game certainly seems to have evolved. Square Enix shifting development over to next-gen after it became apparent that the scope of *XV* wouldn't be realised on current systems.

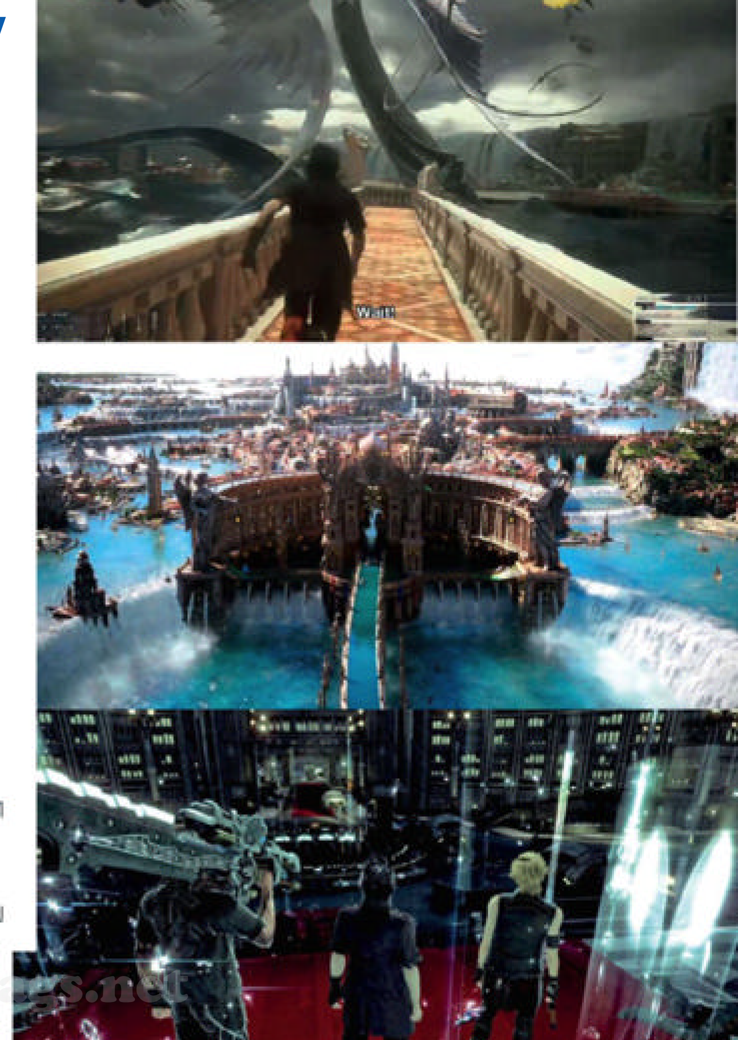
Final Fantasy games have been moving further away from the turn-based template that the franchise established its name on, with *XV* presenting perhaps the most drastic alteration to that core formula that we've seen from a game in the main series.

The battle system is real-time, with protagonist Noctis moving across the screen with a speed we wouldn't usually associate with *Final Fantasy*. It seems to share more in common with *Kingdom Hearts* than its predecessors, opting to drawn influence from action-RPGs. The battles are integrated into the environments; we can see players leaping between cover, scaling buildings and linking up with NPCs to pull off big co-operative special moves. It all looks very busy, and has the kind of visual energy that makes *Final Fantasy* seem a little less antiquated than it's currently perceived as in some circles.

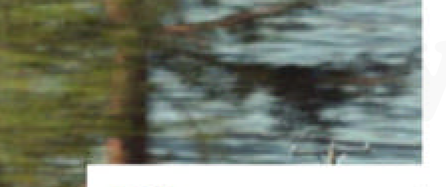
Final Fantasy XV was impressively presented, and while we're not convinced it'll be finished within any reasonable timeframe based on the wait we've had already for this entry, it does look like the kind of title that could reignite interest in *Final Fantasy* after a contentious few years.

HISTORY

Reportedly, co-director Tetsuya Nomura found himself so inspired by last year's film adaption of *Les Misérables* that he intended to change *FFXV* into a musical.



Never one to disappoint, Square Enix has revealed *Final Fantasy XV* with as much flair as possible. It's difficult to not be impressed by its action-heavy combat.



The PlayStation 4's November release date is drawing closer and we are still yet to see a clear launch day system seller exhibited from the company. One that's bound to attract a certain audience, however, is Evolution's *DriveClub*.

Ditching the off-road antics of *MotorStorm*, Evolution is working towards a realistic driving simulation. Out of E3 2013, it's clear that the competition between racing titles is going to be incredibly fierce this Winter, and *DriveClub* is lacking the visual edge that *Need For Speed Rivals* and *Forza Motorsport 5* have in abundance.

Technical shortcomings aside, Evolution is putting a lot of its development time into the social and competitive aspects of its new IP, and this is where the studio hopes to define its racing games.

"Not everybody is the fastest guy in the world. Traditionally the guy who wins the race is the winner and everyone else is the loser. We want to distance ourselves from that. [We want] to make people feel valuable to their club, to feel engaged," says developer Ben Gouldstone.

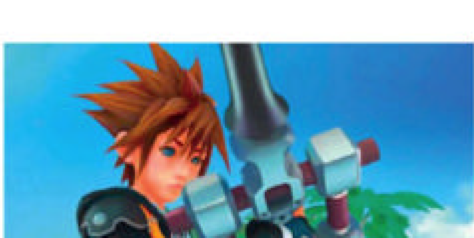
We've documented in the past how *DriveClub* is building a social club directly into its framework and, after getting hands-on, it's clear that *DriveClub* is shaping up to be something special. The game is designed so all players, whether you're shaving seconds off of lap times or simply tearing round corners in exotic cars, are earning fame to ultimately help your club.

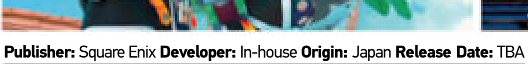
"To me the main hook for multiplayer is the concept of the club, because what all those features do is allow all club members to essentially be valuable to their club. All that fame that we're gaining as individuals is shared with one another, and it helps our club progress. The faster our club progresses, the more rewards we are gathering together," he says, adding. "So it means that if you're the greatest driver in the world or the worst driver in the world, you're still valuable to your club, you win together. That's the exciting thing for us on the multiplayer side of things."

DriveClub is blurring the lines between single and multiplayer experiences; as long as your PlayStation 4 is connected to the internet you'll quickly see that the game is "tailoring itself to your level of ability," pulling new times and goals directly from leaderboards as you gain skill and speed. It's an interesting concept, and if the community takes to it, Evolution's connected driving world will surely define its competitors' approach.

"IF YOU'RE THE GREATEST DRIVER IN THE WORLD OR THE WORST DRIVER IN THE WORLD, YOU'RE STILL VALUABLE TO YOUR CLUB"
Ben Gouldstone, Evolution Studios

HISTORY
Evolution Studios has stated that the idea for *DriveClub* dates back to before the studio was working on the *MotorStorm* franchise.





Publisher: Square Enix **Developer:** In-house **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** TBA

KINGDOM HEARTS III

Mickey Mouse and the gang return

Square Enix made a massive statement of intent at E3 2013. While the unlikely return of *Final Fantasy XIII: Versus* surprised, it was the appearance of *Kingdom Hearts*' Sora during the PlayStation 4 conference that shocked.

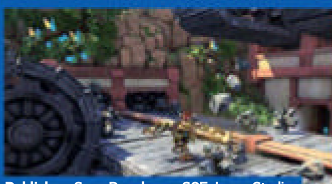
After years of rumour and speculation, *Kingdom Hearts III* has been confirmed. The game is set to pick up from where last years' 3DS adventure *Dream Drop Distance* left off, as Sora, Mickey Mouse, Goofy and the rest of the ensemble embark on the a journey to put a stop to Xehanort once and for all – ending the Dark Seeker saga that began back in the original *Kingdom Hearts* on PlayStation 2.

The short gameplay teaser, admittedly, was fairly ropey. The developers have shifted the art style for this instalment, and it looks like a blend of the realistic figures seen in recent *Kingdom Hearts* releases and the paintbrush art style originally envisioned when Square began the collaboration with Disney a decade ago.

It's obviously far too early to make a call now, considering the limited nature of the reveal, but we're pleased to see the series return. Game director Tetsuya Nomura has reportedly approached Disney about the inclusion of Marvel and LucasFilm characters, which seems unlikely to us, but nonetheless Square Enix always makes the most of the properties available.

Xbox fans should also rejoice, as the core *Kingdom Hearts* franchise makes the jump to multi-platform. With the original seeing an HD remake release for PlayStation 3, the series' dormant period appears to be over – our interest in the franchise's many spin-offs has certainly waned. Nomura has already promised more details will be released later this year; let's hope it's not another *Versus XIII*-style release situation.

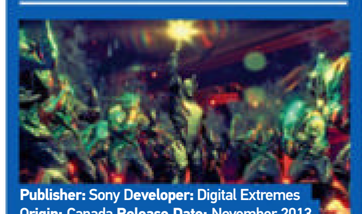
PS4 ROUND-UP



Publisher: Sony **Developer:** SCE Japan Studio **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** November 2013

KNACK

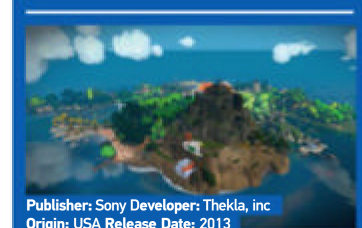
● *Knack* is at risk of being buried by all of the sci-fi shooters flooding to next-gen, but Sony's Pixar inspired platformer looks like an interesting enough curio for launch. Brimming with charm and a signature style, we're somewhat optimistic for *Knack*.



Publisher: Sony **Developer:** Digital Extremes **Origin:** Canada **Release Date:** November 2013

WARFRAME

● Console gamers are still coming to terms with the idea of free-to-play releases, and Digital Extremes is in a position to make a lot of launch day PlayStation 4 owners happy. The co-operative FPS is coming as a system exclusive, with or without PlayStation Plus.



Publisher: Sony **Developer:** Thekla, inc **Origin:** USA **Release Date:** 2013

THE WITNESS

● Sony's commitment to making its new system the home for independent developers was flaunted at E3 2013, with Sony announcing nine titles making exclusive debuts for the console, but it's Jonathan Blow's *The Witness* puzzler that's leading the charge.



Publisher: Sony **Developer:** In-house **Origin:** USA **Release Date:** 2013

DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

● MMOs have never been particularly successful on consoles, but Sony hopes to change all of that. *DCUO* will make the jump to the PlayStation 4 alongside *PlanetSide 2*, *Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn* and *The Elder Scrolls Online*.



XBOX ONE: ON THE OFFENSIVE

Microsoft hits back at the hardcore with a slew of new game announcements. But will it prove enough for Xbox One to reverse the consensus?

While some have already made their minds up on Xbox One, despite the reversal on Microsoft's DRM policies, the console is now on pretty much even ground with Sony if we put pricing to one side. And what a line-up that the Xbox One boasts above its competitors with a vivid ambition to cater to a myriad of genre tastes, uniting bespoke IPs, resurrected brands and some of the biggest developers in the industry under one admittedly plain-looking piece of hardware.

It was a staunch statement of intent from Microsoft, reaffirming that the company is resolved to drive innovation on the next generation. It promised games and it delivered. Respawn Entertainment – formed by ex-Infinity Ward devs after the widely-publicised mass walkout in 2010 – pledged its allegiance to the console with its Xbox One exclusive *Titanfall*, Capcom reinstated *Dead Rising* as an Xbox exclusive with its second sequel and then there's Insomniac Games – traditionally regarded as one of Sony's integral third-party studios – taking to the stage to announce *Sunset Overdrive* for the new console.

However, the E3 show was not without its posturing or questionable oversights. Indie publishing barely garnered a mention, receiving neither the acknowledgement nor the assurance that it would be committed to the Xbox One mandate. Below, an indie offering from the creators of *Superbrothers: Sword And Sworcery*, was given a concise unveiling before being shooed off-stage and the audience fed another triple-A behemoth lest they grow impatient. Even news on Microsoft's technical advancements in Kinect and SmartGlass barely integrated into the production – where was the uncomfortable twenty-minute segment of Kudo Tsunoda trying to be a gaming Bono on stage?

But above all, it seems that Xbox One can't escape the negative press, a factor that was exacerbated by its retail price point of £429. It's a figure that belies the presentation's gamer focus; clearly angled towards the high-end technophile and, perhaps, even a slice of Apple's broad market dominance. This is, after all, a device crafted specifically to offer all of the user's entertainment in one convenient box. It's 'All in one,' as the slogan states. But it remains to be seen if it'll be one for all.

Publisher: Microsoft **Developer:** Turn 10 **Origin:** Netherlands **Release Date:** November 2013

FORZA MOTORSPORT 5

And when Turn 10 saw the cars they had created they wept, for there were no more polygons to conquer

The cars in *Forza 4* were apparently so perfect, so immaculately rendered, that they stopped looking real. Developer Turn 10 realised that these supercars weren't grounded enough in reality, so it had to go back and seed their design with imperfections; paint flecks, machining marks, dust and scratches and dirt. Take your car out for a spin, and you're going to end up with rubber wear and grime on the bodywork and glass simply because you've hammered it round a track at top speeds for several minutes. All things that suggest your cars exists in the real world, and not some virtual playground.

It's worked. *Forza 5* is a graphical masterpiece, a jaw-dropping work of making pretend cars look as much like real cars as it's physically possible to achieve. Each and every one of the hundreds of cars – including Indycars and Formula 1 vehicles – present is available in Forzavista, nee Autovista, that lets you pan around the car and look at it longingly while seriously considering your lifestyle choices up to this point. In *Forza 4* this experience was limited to 24 cars only; in the sequel no machine is safe from your wandering eyes

To be blunt: this is car porn of the highest order, and like all porn, the storylines are numerous and fairly thin. Unlike the single story mode of its predecessor, every single one of *Forza 5*'s cars comes complete with a full single-player career, based on old rivalries between manufacturers and building a narrative out of the rivalries between racing teams and manufacturers. It seems like it's going to be hard to make your career stand out from all the others, but no-one straps on their leather gloves looking for a strong story, do they?

Thankfully, if you're just in it for the pictures, upgrading your cars has been simplified – while you can still get down to the nitty gritty of it and adjust things like your car's gear ratios, camber, aero and ride height amongst a multitude of other options, it's not possible to boost the performance of your car with a single button-push, which is good news for those of us without the technical knowledge needed to keep virtual cars in top-drawer condition.

Aside from the blistering next-gen visuals, there's some more innovation going on under the hood. The horrendously-named Drivatar system (pronounced Drive-Atar, not Driv-atar) creates a unique online AI for you by analysing your driving style as you play and then recreating that as a persona that players can race against online; if your avatar wins, you're rewarded with in-game money. It's a nice incentive to do well, but there's something strangely invasive about the whole thing, a sensation that you're continually being watched and judged. Maybe that's just leftover guilt over from the way we feel about those gorgeous cars.

"WE'VE BEEN DEVELOPING THIS FOR FOUR YEARS, AND WE'VE BEEN INVOLVED WITH THE HARDWARE ARCHITECTURE OF THE XBOX ONE… THERE ARE CHIPS ON THE MOTHERBOARD THAT ARE THERE BECAUSE OF US"
Alan Hartman, Studio Head, Turn 10

Turn 10 has spared no effort in recreating hyper-expensive cars with the utmost attention to accuracy.

INSIGHT
A variety of urban tracks form the core of the game's experiences – devs from *Forza* surprised police by taking data capturing hardware through the city streets at night to get accurate information.

Forza 5 allows you to pull off shots that would, in real life, be unaerodynamic at best and suicidal at worst. With all the motion blur, sometimes it's hard to just relax and take in the pretty scenery.

Zombies remain as ugly as ever, if not even uglier. They certainly seem to have a higher percentage of face rot than before.

Publisher: Microsoft **Developer:** Capcom Vancouver **Origin:** Canada **Release Date:** November 2013

DEAD RISING 3

Capcom's third outing takes zombie-bashing out of the malls and casinos and onto the streets



Capcom had said that the Xbox One hardware has allowed them to take the game in a "new, more mature, sophisticated direction." For fans of the previous two entries in the series this is worrying to hear, but it is also a lie. Halfway through the demo shown at E3, grizzled protagonist Nick Ramos is wearing a shark outfit and using a gun he made out of a shotgun and a spare grenade to eviscerate crowds of zombies. *Dead Rising 3* is still reassuringly daft.

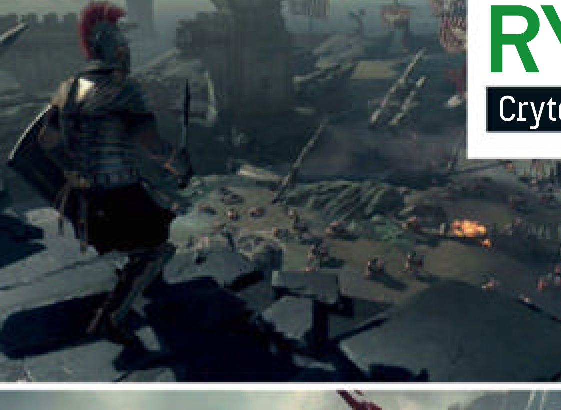
The hardware hidden in the Xbox One *has* allowed them to do some nice things with the scale of the game, however – *DR3* takes place in an open area big enough to require vehicles to navigate it effectively, and we're assured the entire thing will stream without load times as well as accommodating roughly three times the number of zombies onscreen as *DR2*.

Weapon combinations have been given an overhaul, too. Nick isn't forced to make items on workbenches, instead creating new weapons in the field, and as he levels up he gains the ability to substitute items in a combination – so using a machete, for example, when a recipe asks for a katana.

> **"IT'S THE BIGGEST GAME THAT CAPCOM VANCOUVER HAS EVER WORKED ON. THIS IS THE ULTIMATE ZOMBIE OPEN-WORLD ACTION GAME"**
> John Airheart, producer

Once found, items will be duplicated in weapons lockers located in safehouses throughout the city.

This, coupled with the removal of the trademark *Dead Rising* plot countdown (though you can turn it back on if you want) makes it seem a lot like *DR3* is aiming to be a little easier than the previous titles. Maybe that's no bad thing. It's always seemed like there's never enough time to explore. Oh, and if you have a Microsoft Smartglass phone, you can use it to locate useful locations or summon air strikes on your position, both of which are patently ridiculous ideas.



Leaping into a fight wearing full heavy armour somehow doesn't pose any problems in *Ryse*'s easy-going combat system.

Publisher: Microsoft **Developer:** Crytek **Origin:** Germany **Release Date:** November 2013

RYSE: SON OF ROME

Crytek's historical epic isn't pushing the right buttons yet

Did you enjoy *300*, but find that the sight of so many oily men in big red pants distracted you from the carefully-orchestrated violence? *Ryse* could be the answer to all your problems. Developed by graphical maestros Crytek (hence the errant "y" in the name), *Ryse* takes the brutal world of ancient history and spinning camera angles, sticks a shirt on it, and puts it in your living room ready for you to take control. Or not, as the case may be.

You play a gruff-voiced Centurion by the name of Marius Titus, a force for good in the increasingly corrupt city of Rome, leading massed units in formation and fighting enemies in grim-looking single combat. But all that flash – and there is a lot of flash, as the game looks astonishingly pretty – brings a loss of control. In the demo we were shown, every single enemy Marius fought was finished off with a two- or three-button quick-time event, if they weren't taken down by friendly arrow fire.

And those ubiquitous QTEs don't affect the game as much as you'd think. Perform an Execution – kill moves that are unlocked as you progress through the game and triggered in a random order – and Marius will carry out the moves no matter what buttons you push. The commands unlock small bonuses, like health boosts, which are linked to each specific means of death.

It's like an active reload from *Gears Of War*, except there's no gambling element to it, no penalty for failure. All carrot and no stick. *Ryse* is gorgeous for sure, but it might well end up being the sort of game that's more fun to watch someone else play than to grab the controller yourself. We'd love to be proven wrong.

HALO 5

Publisher: Microsoft **Developer:** 343 Industries **Origin:** US **Release Date:** 2014



***Halo 5*'s reveal trailer was one of the most calculated bits of fan-baiting seen at this year's E3; and that's no bad thing.** Reminiscent of Nintendo's legendary unveiling of *Twilight Princess*, it was a very welcome attempt to bring some old fashioned showmanship to what is now a frequently clinical and business-like event. It's going to run at 60fps, arrives in 2014 and is once again being developed by 343 Industries, but that's about all that Microsoft is willing to give away at this point. The strangely downbeat nature of the teaser suggests a much darker game than the previous instalment, with Master Chief's armour still battered (one presumes) from *Halo 4*'s climactic battle with the Didact, and the wistful appearance of Cortana's inanimate data chip implies that a mission of revenge might be on the cards.



QUOTE

"Just let it happen. It'll be over soon." Congratulations to Microsoft for winning the coveted 'E3's Most Uncomfortable Moment Award' during its on-stage presentation of *Killer Instinct*.

● The free-to-play model has yet to inspire enthusiasm, with only Jago offered as a free character.

Publisher: Microsoft **Developer:** Double Helix **Origin:** US **Release Date:** Q4

KILLER INSTINCT

Following the conclusion of a lengthy trademark dispute, Rare's long-dormant fighting game series is finally set to make its grand return later this year. The arcade original (and the miraculous SNES conversion of it) still feels fresh to this day, but Microsoft's upcoming Xbox One-exclusive looks more like the disastrous (and compromised) N64 KI2 port *Killer Instinct Gold*. The extensive online sharing options are an enthusiast's dream, with both Twitch and Microsoft's own Upload Studio being heavily implemented from launch, and there's even a branded Mad Catz fight stick on its way… if you're the kind of person who's likely to have £150 spare come November. But the measured pace of the original is gone, the free-to-play model robs players of the (essential) pleasure of experimentation, and to call Double Helix's output to date "erratic" would be to do it a huge courtesy. Fingers nevertheless remain crossed.



INSIGHT

The title has lead to some confusion in some corners of the community, but *D4* is unrelated to *D* and *D2* (created by Kenji Eno, who passed away recently).

D4

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Access Games
Origin: Japan **Release Date:** 2014

The follow-up to one of the most divisive videogames of all time (the oddball cult smash *Deadly Premonition*) Access Games' *D4* is an "episodic murder mystery" that's exclusive to Xbox One. A collaboration between Access and Microsoft Studios, it boasts a sumptuous cel-shaded art style and a suitably whacked-out plot involving time travel and plenty of hallucinatory dream sequences. It bears no relation to the Dreamcast's cult survival horror romp *D2* and judging by the trailer, Kinect is very heavily implemented indeed. With Microsoft's decision to bundle Kinect with every Xbox One comes the suspicion that games like *D4* won't be playable in any other fashion, and thus the tech is likely to determine whether it flies or dies. If Kinect 2.0 is the huge step forward that Microsoft is insisting that it is, *D4* could be the biggest surprise of next year.



The teaser trailer shows off the incredible in-engine graphics that the Xbox One can produce, such as this woman stuck in a time-stopped blast.

Publisher: Microsoft **Developer:** Remedy Entertainment **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** 2014

QUANTUM BREAK

An ambitious TV/game crossover

There's no one better at bridging the gap between TV shows and games than Remedy, as its efforts with the *Twilight Zone*-esque *Address Unknown* and *Night Springs* in previous titles *Max Payne* and *Alan Wake* show. What it's proposing with upcoming Xbox One exclusive title *Quantum Break* is much more ambitious, though.

Quantum Break is a time-manipulating shooter featuring three playable characters – one of whom is the villain, as it happens – that struggle around the events following a time-travel catastrophe in the near future that left rips in the time-space continuum – Remedy got in an ex-CERN quantum physicist to advise on the topic, although according to creative director Sam Lake, much of what he said went "over their heads".

But unlike *every other game released up until now, Quantum Break* will ship with the full first series of an accompanying TV show. At certain points in the story, you'll come to junctions in time where the characters can view alternate futures, and it's up to you which one to pick; this unlocks the relevant episode of the show and displays the impacts your choices have made on the plot. Each viewer will get an experience tailored to their choices.

It's a bold move, and perhaps a wise way of integrating TV into the videogaming experience; it takes advantage of the Xbox One's media-centre status, and doesn't bother with trying to broadcast it on SyFy like the poor-all-round *Defiance*. To be fair, Remedy could have just wandered onstage and said it were making another shooter with bullet-time in and we'd have been massively excited.

HISTORY

Developer Remedy apparently consulted a CERN scientist who advised on theoretical physics in relation to the title's time-bending narrative.

Publisher: Microsoft **Developer:** Insomniac Games **Origin:** USA **Release Date:** November 2013

SUNSET OVERDRIVE

Cards played close to the chest with this hipster shooter



What do we know about *Sunset Overdrive*? Not a great deal, at the time of writing. We've been shown a super-cool CGI trailer, where colourful young hipster men and women who look like they've snuck out of a copy of *Rock Band* circa 2008 fight mutants with a variety of improvised weapons – guns that shoot vinyl records, explosive energy drink rounds, that sort of thing – across a post-apocalyptic landscape. We know it's an "open-world shooter," according to Ted Price, head of developer Insomniac, and we know it's exclusive to Xbox One. The trailer suggests that it's set to be an online multiplayer game, as each of the characters that show up have fake nametags hovering over their heads, and we know that the game will feature a fair bit of traversal – much of the footage shows a chap wall-running and using ziplines to make his way across the city.

So, it's like *Gotham City Impostors*, then? It's ticking a lot of the same boxes, for sure, although it manages to avoid the sticky issue of killing other human beings with hi-larious gadgets by replacing the opposing team with glowing, slavering mutants.

For all the faults *GCI* had, it was fun, in a kind of stupid way; there's something cathartic about playing the rejects and underachievers rather than elite spec ops teams. If *Sunset Overdrive* can bring that to the table and serve it alongside some non-derivative gameplay, sign us up. Here's hoping that publisher Microsoft encounters better fortunes with *Sunset Overdrive* than EA did with the quickly-forgotten *Fuse*; Insomniac has a valuable level of quality control.

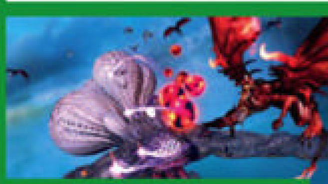
XBOX ONE ROUND-UP



Publisher: Microsoft **Developer:** Team Dakota **Origin:** US **Release Date:** 2014

PROJECT SPARK

● *Project Spark* seems to be a work of design ingenuity. Leading with the concept of making a game a game in itself, *Spark* will let players build vast environments through voice commands and SmartGlass integration, and then share them through Xbox Live.



Publisher: Grounding, Inc **Developer:** Microsoft **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** 2014

CRIMSON DRAGON

● Unveiled at the Tokyo Game Show in 2012 as a Kinect game, *Project Draco* has been overhauled as a spiritual successor to *Panzer Dragoon*. Ditching Kinect, director Yukio Futatsugi returns to spearhead the 2014 Xbox Live Arcade release.



Publisher: Disney **Developer:** Harmonix **Origin:** US **Release Date:** 2014

FANTASIA: MUSIC EVOLVED

● Harmonix has come out with an exciting take on the *Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Teaming up with Disney, the *Rock Band* developer is dropping the score-chasing dependency of its previous titles in favour of a game that rewards expression and creativity through your dance steps.



Publisher: Microsoft **Developer:** Twisted Pixel **Origin:** US **Release Date:** 2013

LOCOCYCLE

● Microsoft is coming under fire for the restrictive requirements it has placed on independent studios developing for Xbox One, so *LocoCycle* is one of but a few next-gen Arcade games announced for the system, and looks like *Tron* meets *Ghost Rider*.





FORMAT: Xbox One
DEVELOPER: Respawn Entertainment
PUBLISHER: EA
ORIGIN: USA
RELEASE: TBA 2014

TITANFALL

The new face of modern warfare

As tiresome as the constant barrage of explosions, shiny guns and shouting men can be in modern gaming, there's still something special about seeing a potentially great online FPS for the first time. That almost intangible combination of spectacle and feel that results in an endlessly compelling feedback loop – the very thing *Halo*, *COD* and *Battlefield* trade on today, and that *Quake* and *Unreal* mastered years ago.

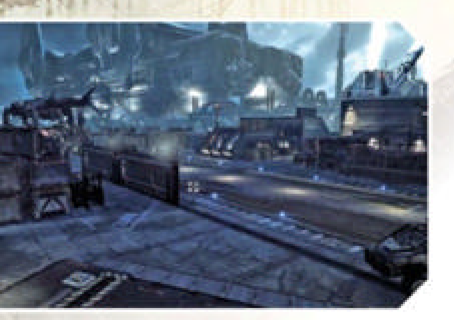
Even from a brief and confusing E3 demo, *Titanfall* has that potential, and it certainly has the pedigree. Reams have been written about West and Zampella's departure from the house that they built – Infinity Ward – and it's refreshing to be able to talk about their talent as creators again rather than their decisions in business. As leaders of Respawn, the two have clearly focused themselves and their team (reportedly about 70 strong – small for a triple-A game) on delivering a product that plays to their key strengths, namely some good-natured online blasting.

There are two things you really need to know about *Titanfall*. Firstly, and most obviously, battles are centred around 20-foot articulated tanks called Titans. They're almost as fast as on-foot infantry, can turn on a dime and – if left alone – will tear through enemy forces like Raiden through a cybersoldier.

The Titans are fully controllable, and accessible after a specific cooldown time. Once your personal Iron Giant is available, it can be airdropped in in an emphatic display of pomposity – hence the game's name – and you can leap in to start your

engines. Unlike most mech games, or even action games with big robots, *Titanfall*'s eponymous bipeds aren't bulky, hulking sloths. They're speedy. And that's the second thing you need to know about *Titanfall*. This game is fast. Faster than *Halo*. Probably faster than *Call Of Duty*, and certainly a lot more mobile. Not only do the Titans themselves move with fluidity and purpose, but the soldiers (referred to as pilots) are all nimble-footed parkour-trained athletes who can leap into cover, spin on the spot, wall run, double jump and put holes in faces in one smooth movement.

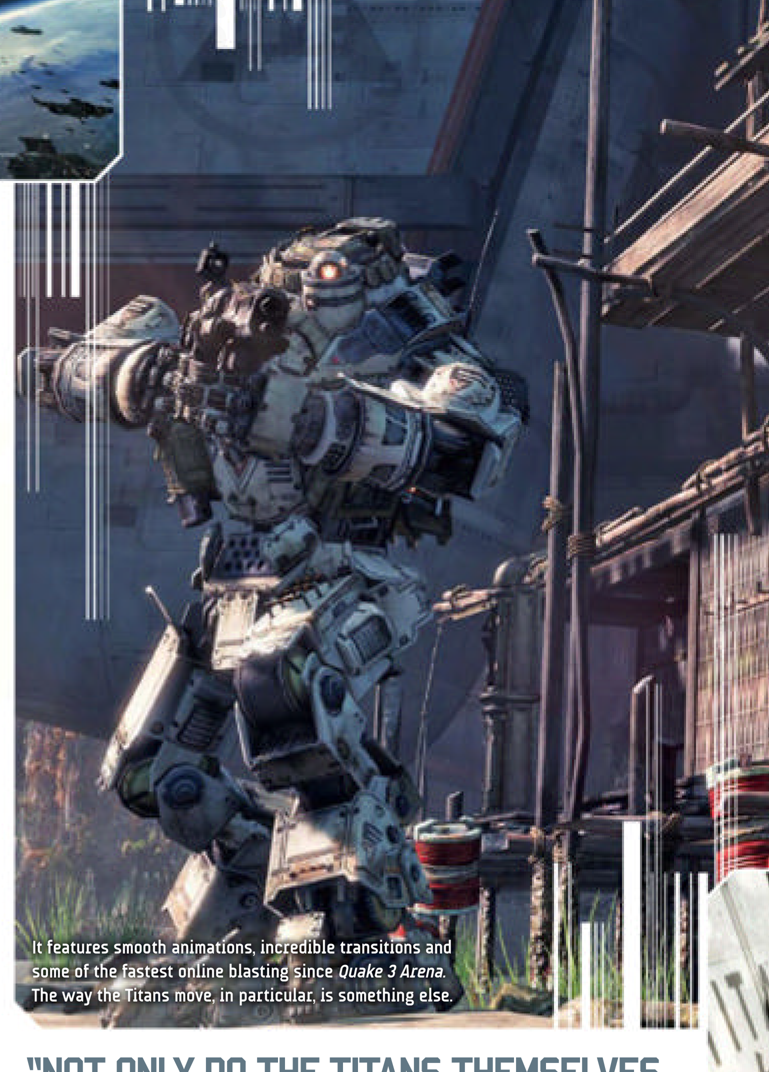
It's a spectacle, for sure. Even though the textures aren't as glorious as you might expect of a 'next-gen' game, *Titanfall* moves at such a rate that it doesn't really matter – there's so much going on at any moment that there's no time to stop and admire the view. Respawn has concentrated on the balance between pilot and Titan, meaning that either is more than capable of putting the other out of commission if the opportunity arises.



By causing more carnage as a pilot, racking up killstreaks, taking capture points and generally being a good soldier, your cooldown time until the next Titan drop decreases. Unusually for a studio called Respawn, the team actually wants players to concentrate on staying alive, building up enough of a score to grab that Titan and then turning the tide of battle in your team's favour.

It's all very impressive. *Titanfall*, along with the fantastic-looking *Destiny*, is part of a new breed of online shooter that's genuinely trying something different. Obviously, those who operate outside of this style of gaming will just see shouting soldiers, explosions and gunfire, but if you're the type who spends hundreds of hours on *COD* or *Battlefield*, then *Titanfall*'s open-ended, large scale twin-paradigm scraps could well be the next evolution in your game. Certainly, the promise of online games that seamlessly blend into single player experiences, plus the raw drama of Titan versus Pilot gameplay, suggests Respawn can already start cashing a few cheques. This has success stamped all over it in giant metallic letters.

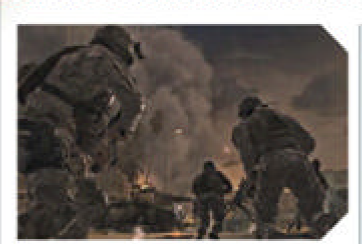
EA has certainly been chasing that *Call Of Duty* dollar for a while now, and with *Titanfall* and *Battlefield* working together, it could have well coordinated the ultimate pincer movement on Activision's biggest franchise. Of course, Bungie's *Destiny* might still win the war for the publisher, but for the only time in conflict history, it'll be the soldiers who end up winning.



It features smooth animations, incredible transitions and some of the fastest online blasting since *Quake 3 Arena*. The way the Titans move, in particular, is something else.

"NOT ONLY DO THE TITANS THEMSELVES MOVE WITH FLUIDITY AND PURPOSE, BUT THE SOLDIERS ARE ALL NIMBLE-FOOTED PARKOUR-TRAINED ATHLETES"

HOW RESPAWN CAME TO BE

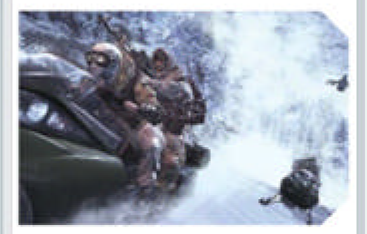


6 November 2007

Shifting from the Western Front of WWII to a modern encounter, Infinity Ward's gamble paid off with *Call Of Duty 4* becoming one of best-selling games of all time. *Modern Warfare* turned the franchise into the behemoth it is today.

10 November 2009

Infinity Ward ships *Modern Warfare 2*, though it would prove to be the final game from the award winning team that re-energised the FPS market. Tensions began to rise between studio and publisher over 'unpaid royalties'.



01 March 2010

Months of negotiations surrounding the possibility of Infinity Ward becoming an independent studio, following successful development of *Modern Warfare 3*, collapse, with Jason West and Vince Zampella fired from the studio they founded in 2002.



12 April 2010

The LA Times reported that West and Zampella had found a new home at EA, founding Respawn Entertainment. Of the 105 developers credited to *Modern Warfare 2*, over 48 would come to find a new home at Respawn.



RESPAWN SPEAKS



Fairfax 'Mackey' McCandlish was one of the first developers to leave Infinity Ward, credited as a design lead, with a writing credit on Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, to reunite with his former colleagues at the newly christened Respawn Entertainment in 2010. We caught up with McCandlish at E3 2013 to talk about Respawn's debut title on Xbox One…

How long have you been working on the game now, and does it feel good to finally get *Titanfall* out in the open?
Absolutely. We've been working on the game for three years, we started in May of 2010, and came up with ideas – we didn't even have computers back then, you know. Slowly we were able to build up and build up to what you see today.

What was the motivation for picking one console format as opposed to multiple formats?
We really want to make the best game possible, so to do that you kind of have to see what you can do to make the job easier, and one way to do that is only to pick one console. So we've been developing the Source Engine which is, you know, primarily on the PC, as a starting point, then we had to pick a console – we picked one, and that's the one we focused on.

Is your prior relationship with Xbox a factor as well?
Well, looking back in the past, obviously we have a really strong relationship with Microsoft that we're proud of, so with the information we had, that made the most sense.

In building this fictional universe, did you have free rein to create whatever you wanted?
You know it feels like over the last couple of years, maybe starting around the mid-2000s, the sci-fi movies started to get better and more entertaining, and I started to see more things that we could use in games coming from those movies that [weren't] necessarily from the war movies. [We] were really influenced by *Saving Private Ryan* and *Black Hawk Down* in the early 2000s, so it made a lot of sense to capture that cinematic quality in games, but now you have *Iron Man*, *District 9*, *Transformers*… it's almost like it's that time, to have that game.

Are any of those movies your visual influences for the game, then?
Nope, we're very heavily influenced by what we think could actually be real or be made. So, I'd say that the biggest art influence is real stuff. We just go out there and find reference from the real, but those movies all have various cinematic influences, like the way *District 9* characters catch bullets, or the way Iron Man is moving, that sort of thing.

Something the game seems to share with *District 9* is that raw industrial art direction – is that something you were aiming for?
Absolutely. It's very grounded, it's very, I believe this could be real but it's fantastic as well. The level we're demoing has parts of the world falling apart because giant fracture machines, that are doing fracking to get the fuel out, are destroying the world. So it's things from real life but writ large, like an amazingly huge canvas that you could never do in a purely realistic setting.

Can you talk about how Respawn built that world from scratch, up to the point it is now?
We have a very creative team and we all brought different parts of what we love into it. So, there's the challenge of finding the way to make an accessible but fantastic story, so all the characters are very real with real problems and they talk in a real way. Everything's meant to feel like, 'I could be there'. It's not like these guys are space science-y laser blaster dudes.





The pilots move like Faith from *Mirror's Edge*, and can leap on to Titans to take them out.

Respawn ENTERTAINMENT

01 June 2012
On the day of the hearing, everything comes to a head as Activision settles out of court with the Infinity Ward founders. Details of the private settlement haven't been revealed. Infinity Ward went on to work on *Ghosts*.

10 June 2013
After three years of anticipation, Respawn's debut game was revealed as *Titanfall*. A Microsoft exclusive, it seems to be a careful blend of *Call Of Duty*'s XP-hoarding and *Halo*'s energy – but complete with big hulking mechs.

TITANFALL

And how did you forge that distinctive visual style?
Visually, it's obvious that what we do is try to make it seem as if this thing had actually been invented, and we only bring in a science fiction-y element when we absolutely have to for gameplay concerns, so for the most part everything is real first, and then dip into the bucket of 'we could do anything'. Only when we have to. It's like the forbidden cookie jar, because once you've ripped Pandora's Box open, and you go full sci-fi, there's no coming back!

We're intrigued about the challenges of balancing these mech-like Titans with the foot soldiers. How difficult was that to tackle?
That was probably the number one challenge that we've been solving on this game. We went through a lot of iteration, we went through iterations where it was more Titan-focused and more pilot-focused, to try to find, what kind of map does a Titan need? What kind of map does a pilot need? How do we take those two kinds of maps and make them fit together, how do we interlock those pieces so you don't feel like it's too Titan or too Pilot? So, solving that has been an amazing, tremendous challenge, and what we've got so far is an amazing accomplishment.

When a lot of developers throw vehicles into game, they think about spectacle rather than balancing…
Right.

So that's something you were conscious of?
We are a very infantry-first type of shooter company. And it was important for us to find a way to change up infantry in a way that it had never been done before, and making it asymmetric where you've got a small character and a big character makes it that intense infantry game, but have a new perspective on it that hasn't been done.

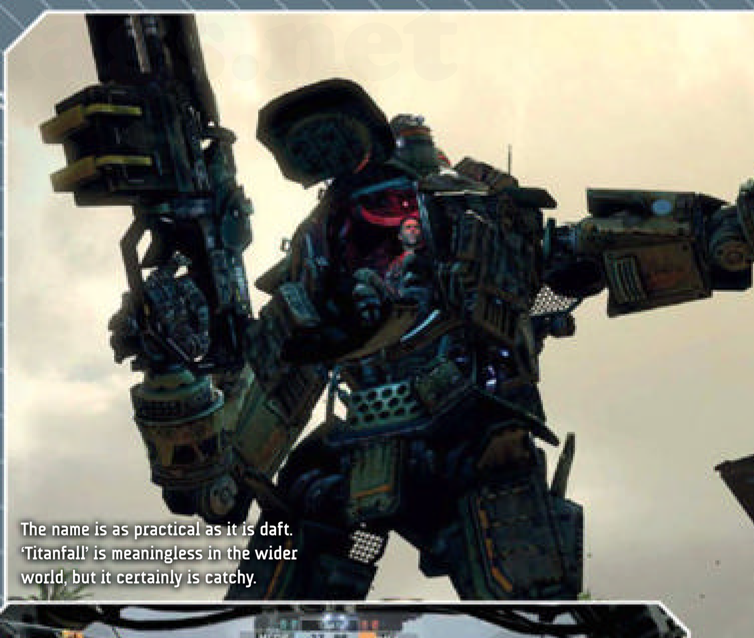
And is the scale of the maps roughly the same across the game, or do you have more infantry and vehicle-based maps?
We do have variety. Everyone at the company has different favourite maps, you know, and some people like to play as a Titan and some people like to be a Pilot more. It's nice – you get a nice variety as you go from level to level. I'm really excited, I can't wait until we can show more of the maps, because if you've seen the trailer you see a bit of the city map, and that's got a lot of really exciting wall-running possibilities. You just look at it, and once you're used to that freedom, you just see everything differently.

When you dive into a larger map, let's say, do you have to think about the game in a completely different way to a smaller map?
Yeah, absolutely. You might use different gear on such a level, you know.

Is it kind of a reinvention of the class system, then?
In an extreme sense, it's more like an evolution in shooter perspective. Everybody is so used to, 'I spawn, I go forwards, I encounter other people like myself.' It's truly unique to spawn and go forwards and encounter these other problems, or encounter contexts and combat that you can't even imagine until you see it. And then you're trying to figure out what you do in that situation, or maybe you're the big character – what do you do when you're faced with three pilots? We want it to solve the problem where players that aren't as good also have the chance to have a lot of fun, so you don't feel like, 'This is not the type of game for me, I can't play this type of game'. But that's what you hear a lot when you're a shooter developer.

We wanted everybody to be able to have fun and part of that is creating this cat and mouse, where even if you're not the best shooter gamer and you're playing against the guy that is the best, sometimes you're the cat and he's the mouse. And that's just really appealing. I'll be playing with some of the guys at work, and some of them are not the heaviest hardcore shooter guys, and they're in the Titans, and I'm the little guy, and I still have a chance – but they might just run me over. Or you know, sometimes you're fighting, and it's pilot on pilot, and you hear out of the corner of your eye this big stomping sound, and all of a sudden a Titan goes by and runs you both over. Anything can happen.

So the Titan is by no means an advantage in every combat scenario?
Well the nice thing about being in a Titan is that you know that you're not going to just die. You're not going to flatline out of nowhere. You're going to have the chance to pull that eject trigger to get out of there, so it's like a second skin. In some ways…I don't know if you played *Bomberman* back in the day, you could crack the egg and get on the dinosaur, you knew you could take a hit and then keep going. So there's a lot of old school influences. *Metal Slug*, or *Master Blaster*…


The name is as practical as it is daft. 'Titanfall' is meaningless in the wider world, but it certainly is catchy.



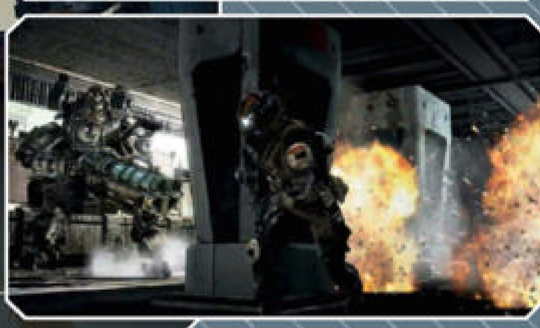
"IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR US TO FIND A WAY TO CHANGE UP INFANTRY IN A WAY THAT HAD NEVER BEEN DONE BEFORE"

Something else that looks appealing is the ability to run up walls as a soldier – what kind of challenges does that create in level design?
You know, it's not only a challenge for the designers, but it's a challenge for the artists, because you have to make what looks like relatively boring flat geo fun. Like the proportion of how good it looks to how good it plays is inverse, because wall-running wants flat surfaces and ninety degree angles. Visually, you don't want flat surfaces and ninety degree angles, so if you see our demo of the level that we're showing, there's a lot of really cool intricate geo that you can wall run off of, and that's testament to all the time they put into really polishing it and making it work, while maintaining these amazing visuals.

Is there a *Mirror's Edge* influence in there?
Mirror's Edge and *Brink*, there are several games that have explored free running. We're the first people to go and put it in a multiplayer deathmatch context with Titans.

Can you talk about how single-player and multiplayer come together?
It's a new thing, it's a little hard to understand. There's elements of single-player and we're infusing them into multiplayer. What you see is what you get. We're not making a traditional play by yourself single-player campaign. So another way to think of it is, when we were making our previous work, we had a team that was making the single-player content, and a team that was making the multiplayer content, with a little bit of crossover – sometimes the multiplayer guys would pitch in and make the single-player geo, because we needed so







The pedigree here is clear. Infinity Ward's core expertise, plus quality headhunted from the SoCal development scene.

much content for single-player. This game is taking the left side of the game and the right side of the game and putting it together, and making one game together.

How has next-gen changed the way you approach level design?
One of the things next-gen has helped a lot, now that computers are getting more powerful, is being able to make up more expansive playspace. Like these levels that we've made, they need so much more production work than the previous gen.

Can you talk about the culture of Respawn? Do you consider yourselves indie developers, of sorts?
It's hard to distil exactly what that means – we're gamers first, we know what we want to play, and that's what we want to make. It may not be obvious, but the decisions we've made in this game are the ones that we think will make the game more fun and more accessible for more people. They're not the decisions that were focus-tested or told by others for us to do – these are the changes we think shooters need to grow.

It's a competitive market to come into – what's ultimately unique about *Titanfall* versus other shooters?
What's unique about this game is the asymmetric but balanced combat of Titans and pilots. It's like a battlefield within a battlefield; it's intermingling two different sized maps that grow and shrink and you have that *Alice In Wonderland* experience. When I was a small guy, this was like a hallway – but now that I'm the big guy, I can't fit through there. It's just a unique experience.

RESPAWNING IN...

5

Though these screenshots are beautiful, in motion, *Titanfall* seems to take the tight handling and moment-to-moment gameplay of *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare* and drag it forward a decade into the future. Considering the history of Respawn Entertainment, it's easy to understand why the team has stuck to what it does best, and the open-scale mech to pilot gameplay has us suitably impressed.

4

A multiplayer-focused title, *Titanfall* is forgoing a traditional solo campaign by utilising the Xbox One's cloud gaming capabilities. AI will be present during all firefights, and the extra processing power that the cloud provides means they aren't just mindless bots used to rack up your killstreak, but fully functioning soldiers on the battlefield, who should be reacting in much more realistic ways than we've previously seen.

3

Whether on foot or powering a titan, Respawn's debut title is incredibly slick. The gameplay is fast and furious – these aren't the kind of mechs you'd find in *Steel Battalion*. The machines are agile weapons of death, despite their obvious size; an extension of your pilot's body. Even in the early footage, it's clear to us that both forms of combat will have their advantages and disadvantages.

2

Titanfall has a lot of style. Every player comes equipped with a jetpack, handy for reaching vantage points, getting into positions for parkour and, more importantly, can be used to meet your Titan as it airdrops from space – landing back on the ground with steel beneath your boots. *Titanfall* looks energised; it's championing a sense of movement feedback we haven't seen since *Mirror's Edge*.

1

The early footage demonstrates what a small experienced team with a big budget can achieve when approaching the next generation. Ships are warping into the airspace above, behemoth Titans battle in tight streets as gunfire is exchanged over the rooftops by opposing pilots. It's hectic, it's ballsy and most of all – it's the system seller the Xbox One is desperately in need of.



Wii U: PLAYING IT SAFE?

Nintendo's new console has suffered a software drought since its launch last year, but can its returning mascots turn its fortunes?

Nintendo was first out the gate this console cycle with Wii U, trumping Microsoft and Sony's upcoming hardware with both a full 12-month lead and retail price palatably below the £300 watermark. However, the company has struggled to maintain interest in the system in the months following its launch, as lacklustre third-party support and a paucity of tentpole titles inadvertently relegated the hardware outside of major competition.

Nintendo's disinclination to enrol itself this year in the big-budget PR war of E3 almost suggests that the company is embracing its newfound bohemian reputation. Nintendo Direct fed information straight to its votaries across the world, offering a personable glimpse at its line-up of fresh software, while elsewhere a series of developer-led videos delved further into each title.

A new 3D *Mario* appeared, as did the return of *Donkey Kong*, *Super Smash Bros.* and *Mario Kart*. Not one of the titles came as a particular surprise, or marked any significant deviation from previous iterations in each saga, making for a noticeably conservative slate at a time when the company could use some fresh innovation to galvanize enthusiasm for the Wii U. It all amounts to a company content with its inward-looking perspective, tooling each of its upcoming products for its decades-in-the-making audience. From the fan-pleasing inclusion of Mega Man in *Super Smash Bros.* to the return of Platinum Games' risqué brawler *Bayonetta*, Nintendo is preaching to the converted. The question is: will that be enough?

Compared to demonstrations of PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, the Wii U fails to measure up to the graphical prowess and ambitious game design of some of the more impressive announcements to surface in recent weeks. It must be said, however, that the Wii U titles on display will likely represent very strong entries in each respective franchise; more fool anyone who doubts Nintendo's relentless design ingenuity and ability to reignite interest in its core franchises.

As the turnaround of the 3DS showed, a determined Nintendo is a good Nintendo. While these new titles may seem safe, they're the kind of reliable mainstays that the company needs to build momentum for the Wii U. The riskier titles will come later – right now, it's important to get the fans on-side.



Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-house Origin: Japan Release Date: Spring 2014

MARIO KART 8

Those moustachioed men in their driving machines

It's been ten years since Amusement Vision's GameCube classic *F-Zero GX*, and we've been pining for a new entry in the series ever since. But with commercial concerns foremost in Nintendo's mind, it seems too niche a proposition to consider. Instead, Nintendo has opted for something of a compromise: bring the kind of spiralling anti-gravity tracks Captain Falcon usually hares around and deposit them into the Mushroom Kingdom. The result, or something close to it, is *Mario Kart 8*.

Anti-gravity is probably the most inventive new gimmick since the twin-rider approach of Double Dash, and nowhere near as polarising. The fold-out glider and underwater sections of 3DS entry *Mario Kart 7* were fine additions – and indeed, both return here – but neither generated the same frisson of excitement as zipping past the turrets of Peach's Castle, hanging upside down by the side of the track. The opening track is a Mobius band twisted into a figure eight, and almost certainly the most striking beginner's course in any Mario Kart to date, evoking the feel of a rollercoaster ride even in 50cc mode.

The sense of spectacle is heightened by what could well be the best graphics on Wii U. There's a tangible solidity to both the racers and the tracks thanks to expert use of shaders and lighting, and Nintendo hasn't been afraid to cram the trackside detail in, without a hint of a knock to the performance. It's full HD, running at a consistent 60 frames per second in single-player, and producer Hideki Konno promises that by launch Nintendo will be able to make the same boast of its two-player split-screen mode.

The three tracks shown off so far provide ample demonstration of the strength of the central idea, enabling plenty of alternate routes and shortcuts across walls and ceilings, though we sense more ambitious uses for anti-gravity might only make themselves known in the later, trickier tournaments. For the time being, it hand-picks the best bits of the Wii and 3DS versions, putting the bikes and the trick boosts of the former alongside the latter's airborne and undersea racing. Up to 12 racers can compete online in a range of modes, while half-minute replays edited automatically from each race can be viewed and shared using a Mario Kart TV channel within the game.

With myriad control options from the Wii Wheel to the new Pro Controller – you can even use the GamePad's gyroscopes for tilt-based steering, though we wouldn't recommend it – the game seems to support Konno's insistence that it's "the definitive *Mario Kart*". We'll still miss F-Zero, of course, but Spring 2014, its continued absence should be much easier to bear.

INSIGHT

Screens don't really do justice to how beautiful *Mario Kart 8* looks in motion. The lighting in particular is exemplary, while we've not seen so much as a hiccup in the frame-rate, even running at 1080p.

"IT'S THE GRAND CULMINATION OF PAST MARIO KART GAMES, A MARIO KART LITERALLY EVERYONE CAN ENJOY"
Hideki Konno, Nintendo

Mario Kart Wii's divisive bikes return, offering extra boost power from wheelies as a trade-off for their relative lack of weight when jostling for position. In truth, we're happier to welcome the return of Toadette to the roster.



You can control the camera yourself in single-player mode using either the right analogue stick or the GamePad's internal gyroscope – all the better for locating green stars that are hidden out of sight from the default camera angle.

Cat Power

NO *MARIO* GAME is complete without a new power-up, and *3D World*'s signature pickup already looks like a bit of a classic. Collect a bell and Mario and pals transform into cats, which gives them a range of abilities. On all fours you can cover the ground quicker, slide into enemies or jump and pounce on them, claws extended, for a surprisingly vicious takedown. More exciting, however, is their use in platforming – you can scamper up walls for a limited time, though you'll slowly slide down if you try to climb too high. There's great speedrunning potential in this idea – imagine chaining it with leaps and wall-kicks to make it to the goal in record time and you can see how transformative it could be.

INSIGHT

The first ever four-player *3D Mario* adventure extends and expands *3D Land*'s obstacle courses for what Nintendo is once more calling a "grand culmination" of the series' best ideas to date.

Publisher: Nintendo **Developer:** In-house **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** 2 December 2013

SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD

Mario's sitting kitty in his latest Wii U outing – claws for concern, or a mew beginning?

The jaunty musical themes are catchy enough, if no substitute for the orchestral splendour of *Galaxy*'s soundtrack. Don't expect joyous fanfares.

It was understandable that some were underwhelmed by *Super Mario 3D World*'s unveiling. A new *3D Mario* platformer is usually a defining, once-in-a-generation title – even if last time Nintendo managed to bottle lightning twice – but this seemed a little too safe, too familiar. The sense of wonder that *Galaxy* provoked was missing; in its place, a retread of the 3DS game's comfortingly geometric environments, filled with recognisable shapes, ideas and enemies. Here are the flipping blue and red platforms from *Galaxy*. Over there is a teleport block from *3D Land*.

Of course, first impressions can be misleading, and that's certainly the case with *3D World*. The longer you look (and play) the fresher it seems. Koichi Hayashida and company may have dialled back the ambition in one sense, but the arrival of a proper 3D multiplayer *Mario* game is surely something to be excited about.

The levels are much more expansive than *3D Land*'s obstacle courses, the new enemies, features and graphical fidelity also making it plain that this isn't simply a 3DS game hurriedly expanded to fit Wii U for the sake of getting a new *Mario* game out there. Indeed, it's arguably as reminiscent of *Super Mario Bros. 2* as its immediate predecessor, not least because they share an identical character roster. Each hero retains similar abilities: Luigi's more skittish to control but can jump higher and farther; Peach is good choice for novices, her parasol floating her over gaps; Mario's your standard all-rounder. Only Toad differs a little from his NES incarnation, sprinting faster than any other player and making him the perfect choice for veterans and speed-runners.

There's even a hint of *Zelda* when it comes to multiplayer, specifically *Four Swords*' blend of the co-operative and competitive. Players can help less skilled allies by carrying them out of harm's way, but there's plenty of opportunity to exercise your malicious streak: you can easily lob rivals into the void or at enemies. All players are graded after as level is completed, the score based on a number of factors from coins collected to enemies killed, with the height of your flagpole grab determining a final bonus. It's 10,000 points if you reach the top, while any players lagging behind will race to the finish lest they end up without an extra score boost at all.

> **"THE GREEN WARP PIPES ARE KIND OF A POPULAR SYMBOL NOW. BUT I'VE ALWAYS WONDERED: WHAT'S MARIO UP TO WHILE HE'S IN THERE?"**
> Koichi Hayashida, Nintendo

Elsewhere, you'll have to work together to progress. One stage sees all four players riding what appears to be a giant relative of Yoshi across a long stretch of water, each leaning to guide the swimming 'saur around hazards and through boost rings, and leaping to clear rows of aquatic enemies. It's a fine example of *3D World*'s sheer variety: one stage might have you lobbing snowballs at frozen Pokeys, the next sees you playing dodgems in giant ice skates. Another has black floor tiles that can be coloured in with ground pounds, followed by a vertically scrolling chase away from a rising tide of Fuzzies. It's happy to pilfer a few ideas from previous games, of course: *3D Land*'s sprints through the clouds play like an exuberant auto-runner, Mario and chums galloping through boost pads for a burst of extra pace.

Just the one new power-up (see 'Cat Power' boxout) has been shown off so far, but there are enough twists on conventional *Mario* tropes to show that Nintendo hasn't run out of great ideas. Witness, for example, the transparent warp pipes, with junctions that allow a sliding Mario to dodge enemies – assuming he hasn't hurled a few fireballs down there to clear them out first. Or even the retooling of *Galaxy*'s Co-Star mode, as GamePad players tap enemies and platforms to freeze them, or jab suspicious-looking areas to reveal trails of coins or hidden blocks.

In short, it's a *Mario* game comfortable in its own skin, happy not to define its host console, but to simply offer fantastic entertainment. And this time three others can join the party. Come December, we may all wonder what there ever was to be underwhelmed about.



In four-player mode, the game adopts a similar isometric view to *3D Land*, though the viewpoint does shift around from time to time. It zooms out to accommodate all four characters when they're spread apart – anyone who falls behind will be encased in a bubble until they catch up.





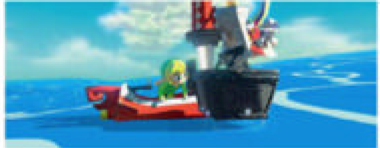
Publisher: Nintendo Developer: Retro Studios Origin: Japan Release Date: November 2013

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY: TROPICAL FREEZE

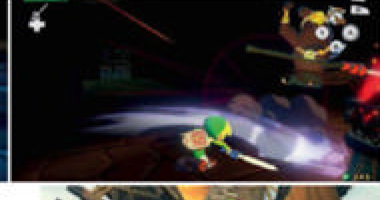
Retro Studios continue to ape Nintendo's heritage

Nintendo's chief Western development team returns to *Donkey Kong Country* in the sequel to the Rare-inspired platformer from 2010 but aside from the impressive graphical bump, *Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze* seems to be sticking very much in its comfort zone. That's not to say the 2D platforming is anything but exquisite (it is!), but it lacks the imaginative spark to distinguish the sequel from its predecessor and certainly illustrative of Nintendo's unwillingness to leave its commercial comfort zone. However, the aforementioned HD makeover emphasised Retro Studio's stylish visual touches and *Donkey Kong* benefits from the crisp graphical overhaul – you can just about make out individual hairs resting on the primate's bristled back.

There's a stunning amount of detail in animations and environments; Nintendo is realising the true vibrancy of HD gaming. Without a doubt, *Tropical Freeze* is wringing every last drop of potential from its concept – bolstered by the addition of ex-Rare and *Donkey Kong Country* composer David Wise – and Nintendo is clearly banking on its nostalgia-hungry zealots to lap up the evocative design of *Tropical Freeze*. It's unquestionably a quality product, but considering how Retro Studios translated the world of *Metroid* into 3D with a remarkable approach to environmental design, we can't neglect the feeling that *Donkey Kong* isn't as progressive as it needs to be right now. We look forward to the day when the ape, once again, reigns supreme.









Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-house Origin: Japan Release Date: October 2013

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER HD

Back to the high seas

***The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD* is much more than a 1080p transfer of the GameCube classic.** The colours have been muted slightly; the cartoon aesthetic has been toned down a touch and a few new features that distinguish it from its original incarnation have been added. Nevertheless, it's an affectionate revamp of perhaps the most divisive entry in the franchise to date, which placed a greater focus on exploration that retains its intimate sense of wonder and awe a decade after its release.

The first thing we noticed was how comfortable *The Wind Waker* is to play using the Wii U's GamePad, certainly a more instinctive control method after using the Wii Remote in *Twilight Princess* and *The Skyward Sword*. Motion control still plays a role: you use the GamePad to aim Link's telescope. But for the most part the GamePad is utilised for quick management of inventory items.

The biggest edition to the Wii U port is Tingle Bottles, enabling players to send messages and pictographs over Miiverse – replacing the Tingle Tuner that was used with the Game Boy Advanced in the original. Ultimately, for those patiently waiting for the true original *Zelda* on the Wii U then *The Wind Waker HD* is more than a serviceable stopgap. It's a burnished update of the classic, more valuable than standard HD ports of its ilk and well worth getting excited about.

HISTORY

Notoriously Aonuma removed two dungeons from *Wind Waker*, the design of which would influence the design of stages in later *Zelda* titles.



Players can unlock faster ship speeds, which alleviate the tediousness of sea navigation.



An AI-controlled Jeanne joins in for a co-operative attack, and Platinum is also promising a special two-player mode, separate from the story.

Publisher: Nintendo **Developer:** Platinum Games **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** 2014

BAYONETTA 2

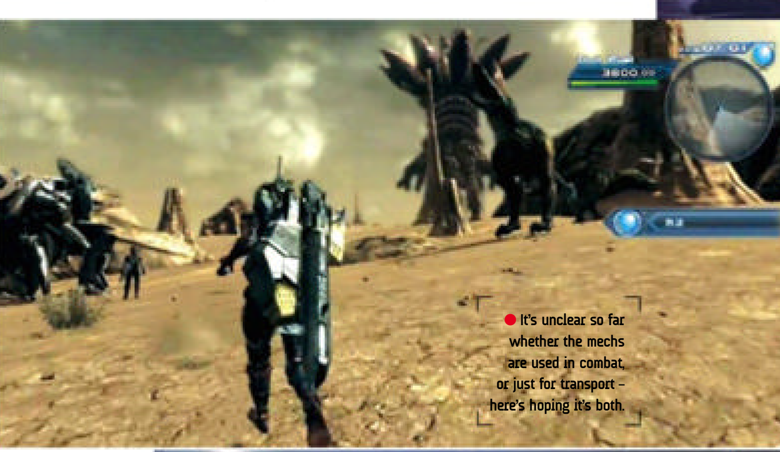
A new look for a new console, as Platinum redefines Climax Action

Beyond a new haircut, a brighter art style, and a new power known as Umbra Climax, this is the *Bayonetta* we all know and love. Good. The original remains firmly in the top tier of action games, and its systems didn't need much tweaking. Instead the sequel simply aims to refine its blend of fast-paced, fluid fighting, and dial the rest up to 11.

There's an operatic level of stylish ultraviolence in *Bayonetta 2*, and while the gory Torture Attacks haven't been toned down any – a sharp-toothed trap gorily snaps an enemy's head clean off, while the witch casually punts another angelic opponent into spinning buzzsaws – there's a darkly comic touch to these finishing flourishes that sets it apart from the sadistic bloodletting of, say, *God Of War*. *Bayonetta* herself still moves with grace and speed, balletically dodging attacks before activating Witch Time mode to slow enemies down, though her hair attacks are even more spectacular, coming in lurid shades of purple and red, and tripping, punching and smashing anyone unfortunate enough to get in the way.

All this takes place on the wings of a low-flying fighter jet, before the action switches to a speeding train, hurtling along a track that eventually ends up in pieces in the sky. It's a wonder Platinum keeps the action so readable with so much going on, but it seems intent on one-upping itself: a later stage sees *Bayonetta* sprout a pair of wings to battle a demonic beast up the side of a glass skyscraper, before summoning an underworld ally to even up the odds. It's a monument to excess, in other words, but amid all the chaos *Bayonetta 2*'s brawls are as tightly orchestrated as ever.





It's unclear so far whether the mechs are used in combat, or just for transport – here's hoping it's both.

Publisher: Nintendo **Developer:** Monolith Soft **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** 2014

X (UNTITLED PROJECT)

Why the game with no name is one of Wii U's most enticing prospects

After the wonderful *Xenoblade Chronicles* reinvigorated the JRPG, hopes are extremely high for Monolith Soft's Wii U debut, and its fleeting E3 showing did nothing to dampen anticipation. The latest footage hints further towards it being an extension of the *Xenosaga* series rather than a sequel to *Xenoblade*, as an unnamed hero purposefully strides through a hangar of bipedal mechs, which begin to whirr and clank to life.

The HUD seems to suggest these large mobile suits will be known as Dolls, and they can be piloted around a huge open world that looks to push Nintendo's hardware to its limits. With the possible exception of *Mario Kart 8*, nothing on Wii U looks quite as good as this: we're treated to views of a futuristic cityscape, a large plain where huge dinosaur-like quadrupeds graze, and an arid desert region, where the mech transforms into a tank to speed over rocky territory. Best of all is the sight of a colossal beast silhouetted against the moon, hanging low in a sky decorated by the swirling colours of a sumptuous borealis.

A sequence where a Doll takes to the skies, flying through a verdant environment studded with large pillars of rock, suggests a seamless world without boundaries, ripe for exploration. Beyond that, Monolith Soft isn't giving much away: it appears you'll be able to take down some of these monsters with up to three friends, though there are scant details on how exactly the combat will work and whether it's online compatible or not. It's clear, however, that this could be something very special indeed: *Xenoblade* plus mechs plus dinosaurs and spaceships equals excitement. Fingers crossed we'll get more concrete info in the coming months.





INSIGHT

Sakurai has stated that the latest *Smash Bros.* was originally intended as a 3DS release, but the limitations of the handheld spurred him to create a counterpart console sequel.

Publisher: Nintendo **Developer:** Sora, Namco Bandai Games **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** 2014 TBC

SUPER SMASH BROS.

Welcome to the punch

There's been one character that fans of Masahiro Sakurai's *Super Smash Bros.* series have universally been hankering for since the series invited third-party characters into the mix: Mega Man. The hero of Capcom's eponymous series was always a shoo-in for the roster; the right mix of 8-bit nostalgic, cartoonish form and a lethal skillset. All of which adds up to an easy gateway for the iconic Blue Bomber to fit snugly alongside Mario and co.

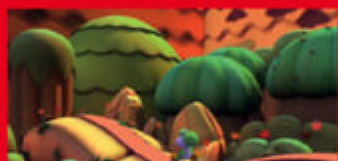
In action, Mega Man's translation into *Smash Bros.* is as faithful as you could possibly expect, packing Robot Master abilities, Mega Buster and his dog Rush – who can boost Mega Man out of precarious situations. Sakurai demonstrates some of his abilities during a bout with Mario: he rattles off metal blades from a distance before getting closer to unleash his Top Spin and Slash Claw moves, leaving Mario reeling on the defensive after enduring heavy damage.

Fan service is the lifeblood of the *Smash Bros.* series and the introduction of Mega Man is precisely the substantial injection of this that the title needed. Whether or not it's an indication of scope or representative of the breadth of non-Nintendo guests invited to the brawl we won't know until closer to release. But Mega Man wasn't the full extent of roster announcements for the sequel, with *Animal Crossing*'s Villager and *Wii Fit*'s Trainer securing spots on the list. Considering that Sakurai has confirmed in the past that the title will support roughly the same number of characters as *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, then expect fewer clones and more original entrants.

"FEARS THAT UNDER NAMCO'S STEWARDSHIP SMASH BROS. WOULD INCREASE THE COMPLEXITY OF ITS FAVOURABLY SIMPLISTIC SYSTEMS HAVE THANKFULLY PROVEN UNFOUNDED"

Its clear co-directors Sakurai and Yoshito Higuchi (producer and director of the *Tales…* series) aren't overly concerned with altering the formula to any great extent – except that the game is perhaps a touch faster than previous iterations. Fears that under Namco's stewardship *Smash Bros.* would increase the complexity of its favourably simplistic systems have thankfully proven unfounded, with biggest enhancement to the franchise being the advent of HD visuals. The vibrancy of previous *Smash Bros.* games was hamstrung by the restraints of its consoles' native resolution – not so on the Wii U. Dynamic environments are bathed in rich lighting and combat movements are accentuated by bright brush strokes of primary colours. Potentially, with the Wii U's more robust online service and conventional controller design (aside from the massive touchscreen, obvs), *Super Smash Bros.* could embrace the prowess of Nintendo's new system to deliver the console's most essential title.

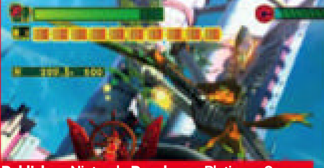
Wii U ROUND-UP



Publisher: Nintendo **Developer:** In-house **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** TBA

YARN YOSHI

● *Yarn Yoshi* failed to materialise at E3, with Takashi Tezuka confirming it was unveiled too early and isn't near completion. The early footage has us excited though, channelling the unreserved charm of *Kirby's Epic Yarn*, so hopefully this will re-emerge sooner rather than later.



Publisher: Nintendo **Developer:** Platinum Games **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** 23 August 2013

WONDERFUL 101

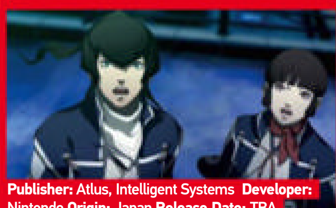
● *Wonderful 101* is one of those rare games destined to be a cult classic. If you're still not up-to-date, imagine superhero-themed *Pikmin* filtered through the minds of Hideki Kamiya and Atsushi Inaba. It might not be a system seller, but it's a must have if you already own a Wii U.



Publisher: Warner Bros. **Developer:** 5th Cell **Origin:** US **Release Date:** TBA

SCRIBBLENAUTS UNMASKED

● *Scribblenauts* is adopting a licence for the first time, letting players explore the DC Universe and scribble any one of its 2000 characters into existence. *Scribblenauts Unlimited* revealed the series was starting to flag, so here's hoping *Unmasked* can breath new life into the franchise.



Publisher: Atlus, Intelligent Systems **Developer:** Nintendo **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** TBA

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI X FIRE EMBLEM

● *Shin Megami Tensei X Fire Emblem*: absent from E3, but not forgotten. The RPG is set to feature characters from both franchises. A Western release seems unlikely, but we hope the success of *Fire Emblem* on 3DS will change that.



BRINGING SMASH TO WII U

We spent the best part of an hour discussing Super Smash Bros For Wii U and 3DS at E3 this year with creator Masahiro Sakurai – discover how the most popular beat-'em-up in the world is evolving across these new platforms, and why he never picks favourites...

It's hard to understand why anyone goes out of their way to declare a console dead within a year of its release. When the 3DS was released to tepid sales in 2010, some critics considered it dead on arrival and assumed that its place in the market had diminished in the wake of smartphones – 30 million units and a few changes of heart later, such talk has now moved onto the Wii U. Nintendo's latest home console needs compelling software, yes, as well as those all-important system-shifting blockbusters, with the return of *Smash Bros.* being one of the most crucial events in turning perception of the Wii U around. Its debut on a handheld, meanwhile, should add yet another laudable title to that console's increasingly impressive catalogue.

"Whether I'm working on *Kid Icarus*, whether I'm working on *Smash*, whether I'm working on a *Kirby* game,



or any game at all regardless of how my staff is put together, the structure of the organisation or the timing," *Smash Bros.* creator Masahiro Sakurai explains to us in a hidden during E3. "Those can all change completely, but for me, my feeling of wanting to create the best possible game that we can create using the materials that we have at hand, that's never changed and it never will." *Smash Bros.* is one of those rare games that earns affection from both mainstream and hardcore players. Those less schooled in the ways of Nintendo are drawn by the idea of Mario and Pikachu fighting each other; for us, it's a reverential, geekier affair where we can enjoy the richest Nintendo fan service available. Masahiro Sakurai remains the gatekeeper of *Smash Bros.* for these two new instalments, and even though they will release simultaneously on both consoles, Sakurai is leaving it up to fans as to whether they pick up one instalment or both.

"For me, really, I don't have a preference whether they own the Wii U version or the 3DS version or both versions," he says. "It's sort of like what I talk about with the game creation philosophy itself – I really want the end user, the game player themselves, to find what they like and really just go with that, so if they find they want to play on this platform, then play on that platform. That's perfect for me. I really want to create something, again, regardless of which one they choose, whether it's an individual [copy] or both, that they have fun with it."

While the game's E3 unveiling was light on mechanics information, with the focus instead put on the character reveals of *Wii Fit*'s Trainer, the *Animal Crossing* Villager

and Capcom's *Mega Man*, Sakurai explains that the rules for each existing character are being subtly rewritten for this entry. "So as far as movement speed and falling speed, we start over, we wipe the slate clean. However, that's just for us internally – probably from the fan side, they are not going to notice the changes we make, it's going to feel pretty familiar."

But some icons will surprise with their revised combat options. "Now there are some characters that are pretty straight up [the same] as last time," Sakurai elaborates. "Then there are some we have done some pretty big revisions to, like Bowser. If you see the video, Bowser's move set is something we've really done quite a bit of work with. I think you'll see Pit has new moves, and we looked at other characters and added some stuff, made tweaks here and there, but once people figure out how to play it, it's going to feel natural. It's going to feel like a familiar *Smash Bros.* and people are going to have a great time."

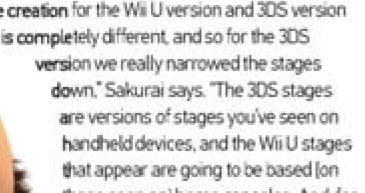
It's hard to figure out where a series like *Smash Bros.* is supposed to evolve – for Sakurai, the design direction behind each instalment appears to be in line with the identity of the console, particularly when it comes to deciding on the difficulty level. "So, let's just break it down pretty simply: [*Melee*] skewed more to the maniac players – the real hardcore players, and that was for those guys. You like *Smash* fighting games? This is for you. It's fast and furious. But *Brawl* was more accessible to people who were maybe playing *Wii Fit* or *Wii Play* – it was an entry level game. What we're focused on now is that middle ground between *Melee* and *Brawl* for this title."

Much as the Wii U seems angled at that middle ground between the Wii's casual userbase and Nintendo's traditional hardcore fans, this entry will hopefully hit that sweet spot between audiences. Let's face it, though – the fan service is a massive part of why *Smash Bros.* has value with these two opposing audiences. To enter so many familiar Nintendo worlds within this party-friendly beat-'em-up, while playing as characters that have been richly interpreted from their original games, is uniquely rewarding for aficionados of any Nintendo series. Bringing that experience to the 3DS offered Sakurai the kind of design challenges he hadn't faced with the series before.

"There's not a lot I can tell you in terms of the game's systems, but I can talk about some of the goals I have – obviously, the biggest goal is creating two different versions at the same time, so just to pull that off. And with the 3DS you have a personal system, personal screen, personal saved data along with making a game that really fits that environment with those conditions: personal screen, personal save data."

There's a clear visual difference between the two versions – noticeable outlines on the 3DS characters, while the Wii U version makes the most of being on HD hardware for the first time. Sakurai explains his methodology. "With the 3DS, first of all, we're looking at a pretty darn small screen for a fighting game. In *Smash Bros.*, you have to pull the camera out to be able to see all of the action, so those characters are going to get pretty small, so what we've done is put a thick outline on the characters so they're very distinct. We've also played around with the ratio of the head and body size, and some of the proportions are changed so even with the camera pulled out, the characters are looking smaller on the screen, you can see the features and characteristics of each individual character are still distinct despite the distance you are seeing them from."

Smash Bros. offers something along the lines of a Nintendo museum, and with the 3DS and Wii U versions incorporating different levels to reflect their handheld and home console origins, that feeling of good intentioned nostalgia is likely to escalate with this difference between versions. "Another thing I'd like to point out is the stage creation for the Wii U version and 3DS version is completely different, and so for the 3DS version we really narrowed the stages down," Sakurai says. "The 3DS stages are versions of stages you've seen on handheld devices, and the Wii U stages that appear are going to be based [on those seen on] home consoles. And, for one thing, there's a small screen on the 3DS of course – the shrine stage is a big stage. You put that on the 3DS, and those characters in proportion become small, so it's obviously not a good fit, so again, we want to choose stages for the 3DS that fit that screen size."



> "When we're looking at new characters, we go through a list with a fine tooth comb"

Hence why players will see levels based on *Super Mario 3D Land*, *Fire Emblem: Awakening*, a moving Spirit Train level based on *Zelda: Spirit Tracks* and a *Nintendogs* room with a dog rolling around adorably in the background on 3DS (there's also a Gerudo Valley *Ocarina* level, which we suppose technically counts thanks to the *3D* port). The Wii U, meanwhile, will have levels based on the Skyloft from *Skyward Sword*, a gym from *Wii Fit*, an *Animal Crossing* Wii city backdrop and a Dr Wily-based stage from *Mega Man*'s history. That's just for starters – think how much potential fun that Sakurai and company could have in exploring the Game Boy's history of monochromic and later colourful locales.

Don't expect the roster to vary between versions in the same way as the levels, though. "Fundamentally we're going to have the same characters on both systems," Sakurai says. "If there was a character you couldn't play on Wii U but you could play on 3DS, or vice versa, that's rough for consumers. So we want players to be able to have the same character experiences on both devices."

Sakurai explains that both consoles have very different concerns when it comes to visual design, and that what we've seen so far of the 3DS version doesn't quite give this handheld iteration its due. "And the same thing with the Wii U screen – since we're an HD-compatible console, we're able to do more details, and bigger stages as seen on previous home consoles. Now of course, I want to point out that everything on 3DS is designed for that screen, and that's where they look the best. It's unfortunate we can't show everyone what it looks like on 3DS, rather than screenshots, while they look fine, do not do that justice once you see it on the system. Too bad we can't





The appeal of any *Smash Bros.* title inevitably comes down to the roster.

show everybody what it looks like on the system." We're certainly impressed by what we've seen in the trailers so far – and the prospect of owning two tailor-made *Smash Bros.* titles is exciting to us.

When it comes to picking new characters for these two *Smash Bros.* entries, Sakurai has a very specific methodology that comes down to gameplay potential. "When we're looking at candidates for new characters, we get a list of characters that people are interested in and we go through those with a fine tooth comb. The biggest feature we look at in *Smash Bros.* is, what does this character bring to *Smash Bros.* that other characters don't?"

Whereas Mega Man was the second most requested character in a survey of *Smash Bros.* fans (Sonic, naturally, was first), *Wii Fit* Trainer and the *Animal Crossing* chap represent more esoteric additions to the fighting game. "The *Wii Fit* Trainer and the villager from *Animal Crossing*, there may be some people out there being like, 'Okay, great, now you're going out on a limb, you're trying to do something strange or unusual, but there's really no meaning behind it, you're just doing it for…' I don't want to say shock value, per se, but just to surprise people. And that's really not the case. I think these are very unique characters and they lend themselves well to the *Smash Bros.* family because they bring things we don't already see."

Disappointingly for some fans, not every character from the previous games will be returning in this new

instalment. We're really hoping Snake, Toon Link and the Pokémon trainer still make the cut alongside the Nintendo regulars (Falco, Lucario and Lucas, we could live without) – but the issue for Sakurai seems to be one of time. "We don't have the time to fully recreate every single character who's been in *Smash Bros.* at this point," Sakurai says. "Adding new characters is not a simple addition – it's really multiplication. The amount of work, adding a character is multiplied and becomes bigger and bigger as you go. We can't because of the amount of work it takes.

"However, I do believe I understand that each character has its own set of fans out there who really like them. So we're not going to cut characters out of the way, we're going to put in as many characters as we can, we really want to do that, because it's good for the fans and good for all of us. But in the event that we do have to cut some characters, I'd like to apologise in advance to those fans."

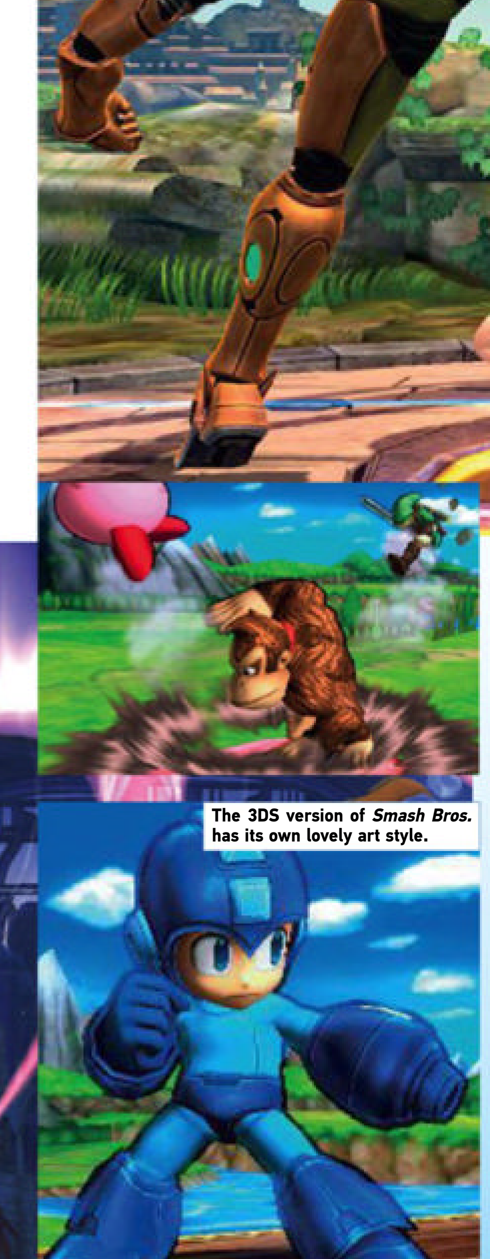
It looks like we won't be short on fan service, however. One of *Brawl*'s best features was the inclusion of GameCube levels, including the brilliant moving *F-Zero* stage Big Blue, which we mention specifically to Sakurai when asking if old levels will make a return in these new sequels. "No comment," he says in English. Except he does comment! "For one thing, if we did do that, stuff that was on Wii would have to be altered to be put on a 3DS. You'd have to make some tweaks. Whether or not you'd do that and still do those justice remains to be seen. We're going to have to look at that." Fingers crossed, then. It's not a no. We mention that porting such levels to Wii U would also have to account for the leap to HD. "Exactly," he replies.

Visually, then, there's no shortage of difficulties in making *Smash Bros.* work for two platforms at the same time. Perhaps one of those least referenced achievements in the *Smash Bros.* is the way Sakurai and his team have forged an art style (plural, in the case of the Wii U and 3DS games) that can comfortably accommodate characters as diverse as Mario and Snake – we asked Sakurai to explain his approach to this. "You really have a good understanding of what we're doing, that's good!" he says.

"Of course, one thing I have to do is, I have the last look at everything. I have graphic supervision over all the assets, so I'm the one who, when everyone's done, they pass it over and I look at it. Let's be truthful: Snake and Mario on the same screen is gonna be odd – but what we have to look at is textures and environments and how they fit in the world, their colours, their size ratios, how they move and how they jump, and all these sorts of things and really make sure, to the best of our abilities, as you said, they look comfortable together."

> "I have the last look at everything. I have graphic supervision over all the assets"

Sakurai has a strong personal criteria that he believes has been key to *Smash Bros.*' gigantic success. "That's not something that you can see, but it's there. If someone else decides to make a *Smash Bros.* type of game, it would not be as successful or well done, because they do not have that measuring stick." It's not an easy operation, weaving so many worlds together into a coherent universe, yet it's perhaps Smash Bros.' crowning triumph as a series. "Now with the new game on Wii U, of course, we're looking at an increased accuracy, an increased quality to the precision in our detailed representation, so Mario, of course, looks closer to the original Mario, because we're



The 3DS version of *Smash Bros.* has its own lovely art style.



able to recreate it in a realistic fashion. For example, you take a look at Link and the contrast on his shield, the way that looks, is better because of the power we have in terms of assets."

With Namco co-developing this time, the paradigm for creating a *Smash Bros.* game appears to have changed from the outside looking in, but Sakurai insists that his role hasn't altered at all in the process, even if the number of people working on the game has increased.

What comes across is Sakurai's gratitude for what he does – bringing Nintendo's wonderfully diverse range of icons into one game is as thrilling for the series' creator as it is for *Smash Bros.*' 10 million plus fans. However the Wii U fares in the next few years, *Smash Bros.* is a series that many will seek out, regardless of the platform they opt for. Sakurai names his continual work on this franchise as the highlight of his Nintendo career. "I think it's just the ability to have created and be working on *Smash Bros.*, because where else in the world are you going to find all of these disparate characters? These companies gave us permission to take their characters and put them in one game, so that's really miraculous to me. That's it right there."

***Smash Bros.* for Wii U and *Smash Bros.* For 3DS will both be released in 2014 by Nintendo.**

Smash Bros. FAQ

How come Smash Bros never came to DS or GBA? Why do only certain Pokémon appear in the games? We got Sakurai to explain a few of Smash Bros' unanswered questions...

Why Smash Bros Is Only Just Coming To Handheld

"It's not that I haven't wanted to – I thought about it, I did. To be honest, we purely didn't have the opportunity, it just never came up. And also, to speak freely, if you look at a handheld device preceding anything before the GBA, I don't know that it would have the capabilities to fully realise *Smash Bros.*"

He Has No Favourite Character

"I believe my love is distributed equally to each and every *Smash Bros* character, so I do not believe I can answer that question… As the creator of Kirby, in the N64 version Kirby was a strong character, so there were some rumours that 'Oh, just because he made Kirby, he's got to make Kirby strong in the game.' Absolutely not true."

How They Choose Which Pokémon To Include

"We talk with The Pokémon Company – what's the hot Pokémon? What Pokémon are in the movies right now? And really do a lot of research on that front. For example, *X* and *Y* are coming out – of course, we haven't done any market research because they're not out yet, but we look at the animated series or movies and anything like that and find out which ones are going to be central."

Why Sakurai Doesn't Favour Fighting Game Characters

"The biggest feature we look at in *Smash Bros* is, 'What does this character bring to *Smash Bros* that other characters don't?'" explains Sakurai. "If you look at…someone from a fighting game already, and people like fighting with this character, from my point of view, it's like 'this guy does what this guy already does. He fills the role that this character already has.' So while you may like this character and he's interesting, that doesn't really merge well, here."



Thankfully the action doesn't solely take place on Manhattan island. The greater New York area is explorable later on too. If you haven't seen the seven-minute E3 reveal yet, we highly recommend visiting Youtube and watching it in all of its 1080p glory.

INSIGHT

Ubisoft's Scandinavian subsidiary was acquired by the French publisher in 2008, since then it's spent most of its time assisting Ubisoft Montreal with the likes of *Assassin's Creed* and *Far Cry 3*.

Producer Frederik Rundqvist revealed that Ubisoft Massive's headquarters is filled with ardent MMO disciples. *The Division* represents the team's attempt to bring their favourite MMO systems to the action-RPG genre.

The Division's gorgeous neon map HUD will help you to find mission locations, looting hotspots and even other nearby players.



Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** Ubisoft Massive **Origin:** Sweden **Release Date:** Q4 2014

TOM CLANCY'S THE DIVISION

Ubisoft's E3 triumph offers up a tantalising glimpse into the future

Operation Dark Winter was an elaborate governmental bio-terrorism drill that took place in the USA in June of 2001. It was primarily constructed to stress-test America's national emergency systems, as well as observe the problems that the media would face when forced to relay highly sensitive health and safety information to a volatile public. Scripted TV news bulletins were even produced – some of which can still be found on YouTube – and the simulation was a rousing success: the principal aim was to improve America's strategy of response, and mission control were given more than enough meat to chew on. In just over six weeks, one million Americans were dead, food had stopped making its way to the country's supermarkets, and the disease (smallpox) had managed to spread to 25 US states and 13 foreign countries. In addition, some form of nuclear response was all but imminent.

This thoroughly uplifting morsel of recent history forms the basis for Ubisoft's new action RPG *The Division*, a mega-budget beauty that aims to completely blur the line between single and multiplayer gameplay. Set in the aftermath of an influenza outbreak in New York City – the virus having been passed briskly around on contaminated bank notes during Black Friday's annual shopping frenzy – it's ostensibly a cover-based third-person shooter that has been expressly geared towards online cooperative play. Although you are able to tackle the campaign completely alone – without AI teammates filling in the gaps – *The Division* is also a light, intricately re-tooled MMO. There are no traditional classes as such but characters are upgraded via MMO-inspired skill trees, as are your weapons and items. Missions that appear as you traverse each region can be tackled in any order, and part of what makes the game so enticing in co-op is that your biggest threat is always other people.

In the real world these opposing groups are doing exactly what you're doing, but when you encounter them in the game they're a hostile threat; as are you to them. To accentuate the co-op even more, *The Division* features some exceptionally neat tablet-based features, shown off during E3 on a high-end Android device. Producer Fredrik Rundqvist told us that far from being a cosmetic late addition, the tablet-powered airborne drones that were emphasised so heavily in the E3 demo were actually developed before the game itself. "Our engine was specifically designed to take advantage of next generation features and specs," he explains. "We challenged our engineers to move away from the gimmicky use of a tablet or an app, and make something that's really meaningful: both for the tablet player and those with consoles."

"WE PREFER TO CALL IT A MID-CRISIS SCENARIO, RATHER THAN POST-APOCALYPTIC. YOU'RE AN AGENT OF HOPE"
Fredrik Rundqvist, Ubisoft Massive

In short, you can play (and significantly contribute to) an online game while you're sitting on public transport, provided (obviously) that your device is connected to the internet. When playing on a tablet you're given an isometric view of the battlefield that's rendered in real-time, and you're able to do things like spot enemies for your teammates, buff their armour, dismantle enemy turrets and (once you've levelled up enough) call in powerful airstrikes. While it's undeniably thrilling to see all of this in action, the seemingly invaluable nature of these drones does raise all manner of questions. If you're bereft of a tablet-owning friend and you come up against a squad who aren't so unlucky, is it game over? Will there be a matchmaking system solely for tablet players who want to help others and/or level-up their own drones? And if so, will mischievous folk be able to turn on their own teammates and attack them?

Running on Ubisoft's proprietary new Snowdrop engine that has been "tailor-made for the next gen," *The Division* was easily one of the most sumptuous games shown at this year's E3. But dulcet aesthetics are all well and good, and what shines brightest here is the palpable ambition of the game's creators, and the suggested promise that Ubisoft are determined not to stifle it.

This time it's personal

BIZARRELY, UNLIKE Ubisoft's similarly ambitious MMO-shaded racer *The Crew*, *The Division* isn't currently scheduled to make an appearance on the PC. However, in the immediate aftermath of the game's barnstorming E3 debut, a petition was set up on the website Change.org, which (at the time of writing) has netted just under sixty thousand signatures. The petition was rumoured to have been actively endorsed by the developers during an interview with Machinima, causing innumerable internet cynics to suggest that the whole thing was nothing more than a lo-fi publicity stunt. It's an odd one: would Ubisoft really launch an MMO enterprise away from the platform that's completely synonymous with the genre? Time will tell, but we'd wager that an announcement is well on its way.

We spent the entirety of *AC III* waiting for a section where we could sneak through the trees and make stealthy kills from hiding; here's hoping it turns up in *Black Flag*.

Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** In-house **Origin:** Canada **Release Date:** October

ASSASSIN'S CREED IV: BLACK FLAG

See Edward Kenway in the game's first hands-off demo at E3

Despite the slightly lacklustre nature of *AC III*, whatever Ubisoft decided to tell us about its latest historical murder-sim was sure to attract attention. What's most interesting about *Assassin's Creed IV*'s showing at E3 2013, though, is what we're not seeing: loading.

In a demo on stage at Ubisoft's press conference, our pirate hero Edward Kenway walks through a camp of vagabonds as he trails a target; as ever, he blends in by sitting on benches and chatting to bystanders in an attempt to give the impression that he's not a dead-eyed killing machine. After following his mark through the jungle, sneaking through undergrowth and across the tree line in a manner very reminiscent of Connor's extreme nature rambles, he emerges into a town under cannon fire from enemy ships and hits the ground running.

After belting through the burning city in a free-running sequence – one that looks to be incredibly frustrating if the player were to, say, push the wrong direction for a fraction of a second and end up on fire – he leaps aboard his ship and engages his attacks in naval warfare. But that's not all! After crippling an enemy ship, he swings Errol Flynn-style from the rigging and lands in hand-to-hand with the surviving enemy soldiers. There's lots to see and do in *Assassin's Creed IV*, apparently.

All this, though, without a single loading screen. It's rare to see so many different kinds of gameplay not stitched together with enforced waits, and if the game can carry this off, that's fairly impressive – creative lead Jean Guesdon claimed back at the revelation that *AC IV* would support loading-free open world play, and this is the first evidence of that we've seen; although, to be fair, the demo was running on PS4 and the path allowed to the player up until they take control of the ship was fairly constrained. If Ubisoft can pull off comparative levels of fluidity, graphical richness, and variety of playstyles on current-gen consoles without making us twiddle our thumbs between sections, then that surely deserves praise.

Also announced were some scant details on the multiplayer elements for the upcoming title – in addition to the standard cat-and-mouse gameplay of the competitive online play (which now comes with the ability to tweak up to 200 different variables, allowing gamers to modify things such as power recharge times and point awards for specific actions), the single-player mode will come complete with optional online features too.

As you're playing a modern-day Abstergo researcher investigating the life of Mr Kenway, other players can give you hints on data and locations to explore; take their advice, and you both gain a bonus, although precisely what bonus that will be remains unclear. This feature comes paired with a smartphone app, because it is 2013 and all Triple-A titles must now have one, no matter how spurious the link to the main game, thanks to UN law.

It's all optional, though, and Ubisoft has confirmed that you are able to play the game offline if you wish. Even Xbox One, now, of course! Reasons to buy the game on PlayStation 4 – or PS3, even – include three special missions starring Aveline, the heroine of *Assassin's Creed Liberation*, last year's okay Vita spin-off, that you can tool around in. Which is nice.

INSIGHT

Assassin's Creed IV is one of the few multi-format games also coming to Wii U this year, along with *Watch Dogs*. Clearly Ubisoft is still happy to support Nintendo's newest home console, then.

"YOU'LL BE BOARDING SHIPS, RAIDING SMUGGLER CAVES, HUNTING, AND FINDING TREASURE… THE GAME IS AN INVITATION TO FIGHT, ROAM, AND EXPLORE"
Creative Director, Jean Guesdon



Seeing the central tower collapse is quite something, and it can be triggered by destroying certain sections of the building. *Battlefield 4* brings levels of unpredictability to online war that other games just can't match.

Publisher: EA **Developer:** DICE **Origin:** Sweden **Release Date:** Q4 2013

BATTLEFIELD 4

EA and DICE look to bring down the house

DICE is in a rare position of power within the EA infrastructure. Not only does it hold the keys to the firm's most lucrative non-sporting franchise, it also makes the very engine that'll support EA's internal action projects over the coming generation. Not bad for a bunch of ex-modders from the freezing shores of Stockholm.

The E3 presentation for the gargantuan *Battlefield 4* was as blustery as you'd expect – the campaign still clawing for attention with its heady mix of explosions, noise and desperate shouting. For those that actually dedicate themselves to DICE's church, though, the real game lies in its 64-player online war, an ever-shifting, endlessly dramatic theatre of carnage that offers depth and immediacy in teal-tinged spades.

And it's the multiplayer that has tongues wagging. The epic match demoed during EA's conference had more than a whiff of staging about it, but getting to see the same thing actually played behind closed doors was a suitably impressive spectacle.

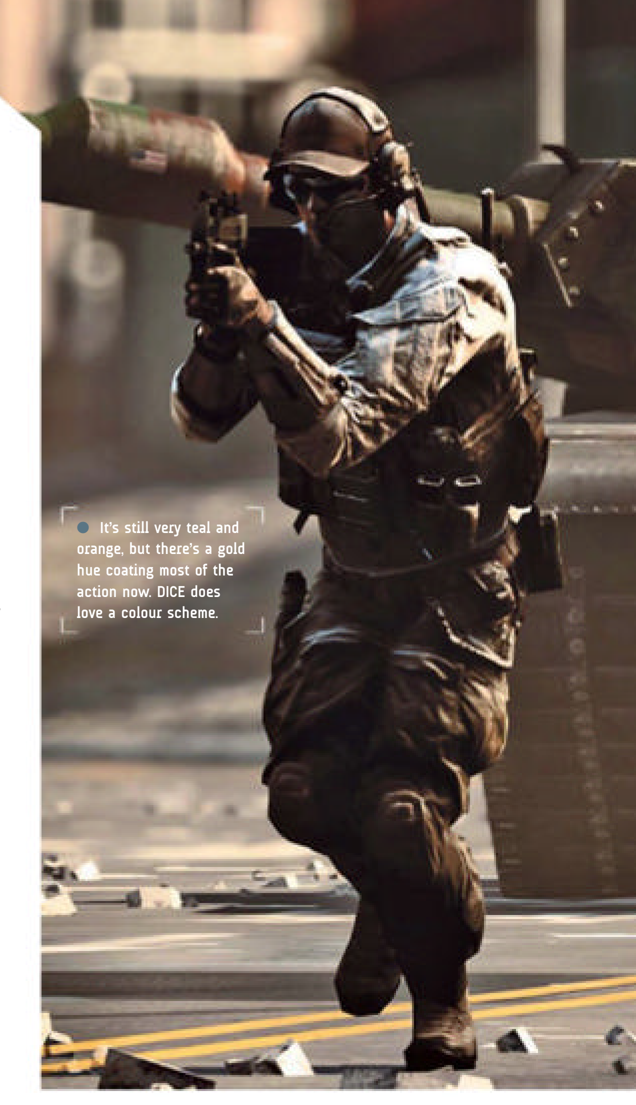
There is not a huge amount that we have not seen before in *Battlefield 3*, but the Commander mode does make a welcome return, having been absent since the days of *Battlefield 2*. The Commander in question – one per team – has an overhead view of the battlefield, and can dish out orders to attack specific points or manage vehicle spawns.

"THE CURRENT CONSOLES DON'T ALLOW US TO HAVE 60 FRAMES PER SECOND IN OUR GAMES AND SO I THINK THE NEXT GENERATION FOR US IS VERY, VERY POSITIVE IN WHAT IT WILL ALLOW."
Patrick Bach, DICE

It'll be interesting to see how the console crowd reacts to such an omniscient voice. Since Bad Company signalled in the console era for *Battlefield*, the game has been so focused on the interactions of its four-man squads that some may balk at the idea of a stranger dishing out orders. Squads are now boosted to five members, but there are no serious changes to *Battlefield 3's* class types. It's a beautifully balanced system, and DICE hasn't seen the need to switch it up too much.

And the same can be said for the fight itself, although those investing in new consoles will likely be overwhelmed by sensory overload when they first log in – this is a serious mark up graphically over the Xbox 360 and PS3 versions of *Battlefield 3*. Less so on PC, obviously, but the increased levels of destruction and the bump up to 60FPS are significant improvements for those schooled in the ways of *Battlefield*. No longer can only *COD* use the 60FPS as part of its marketing – *Battlefield* is doing it too, and doing it on a far larger scale.

Ultimately, as much as EA might like to pretend otherwise, *Battlefield* and *Call Of Duty* are actually quite different, and strangely complementary, experiences. Ignoring the campaigns, as most will do, their approaches to multiplayer are like the differences between fast food and well-prepared steak. Both have their place, both are delicious, but one's just a bit better for you than the other.



It's still very teal and orange, but there's a gold hue coating most of the action now. DICE does love a colour scheme.

Even at this early stage, BioWare's *Dragon Age: Inquisition* is visually impressive.

Publisher: EA **Developer:** BioWare **Origin:** Canada **Release:** TBC 2014

DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION

The third degree

***Dragon Age II* did a good job of alienating fans of the original by simplifying gameplay systems established in *Origins*, but the third entry is set to address those issues.** *Dragon Age: Inquisition* returns to the philosophy of the original, embracing tactical combat, moral dilemmas and exploration – cornerstones of the *Dragon Age* universe. There's more of a narrative urgency as the world of Thedas is threatened by a cataclysmic event, leading dragons and a ream of otherworldly entities to infest the landscape. As the leader of the eponymous Inquisition, the decisions you make (whether to align with the mages or the oppressive fanatics of the Chantry) will have graver consequences on the denizens across the continent. BioWare has said in the past that the impact of *Skyrim* has affected the scope of design on the sequel and it's clear from the debut teaser that the third part will endeavour to connect the disparate strands of the mythology across a much larger and deeper landscape.

Publisher: EA **Developer:** Black Box **Origin:** Canada **Release:** Spring 2014

PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES: GARDEN WARFARE

Gardener's World At War



Taking a heap of the key imagery of *Plants Vs. Zombies* – weapon-spewing vegetation, zombies with fetching headgear – and planting it in a third-person multiplayer shooter, *Plants Vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare* is an nothing if not an odd proposition. But its attempts to translate the winning simplified gameplay and intense strategy – not to mention the plucky humour – into a 3D world appear successful. It follows the basic format of its progenitor, with players repelling waves of invaders, the key difference being that players can switch and move characters by embodying classes of plant and zombie. Reportedly developed by *Need For Speed: The Run* developer Black Box, it'll need more than the popularity of the brand to convince casual gamers of its merit.



Publisher: EA **Developer:** DICE **Origin:** Sweden/US **Release:** TBC

STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT

A game not so far, far away

No sooner than a month after the official announcement that EA secured an exclusive deal to develop *Star Wars* titles, DICE is announced as the new custodian of the *Battlefront* licence. The teaser trailer only served to confirm both its existence and that it would be utilising DICE's Frostbite 3 Engine, but it also implied that the snowy planes of Hoth might feature as a new locale. However, the mere fact that it has returned to active development – having previously been canned under development at Free Radical Design prior to Disney acquiring LucasArts – will be enough to satiate the undiluted appetite for the series. It's interesting to note that the title isn't accompanied by a numeral, suggesting that this could be a reboot – so don't expect any of that leaked pre-alpha footage to represent the game proper. It's a good time to be a *Star Wars* fan.

Publisher: TBA **Developer:** CD Projekt RED **Origin:** Poland **Release:** 2014

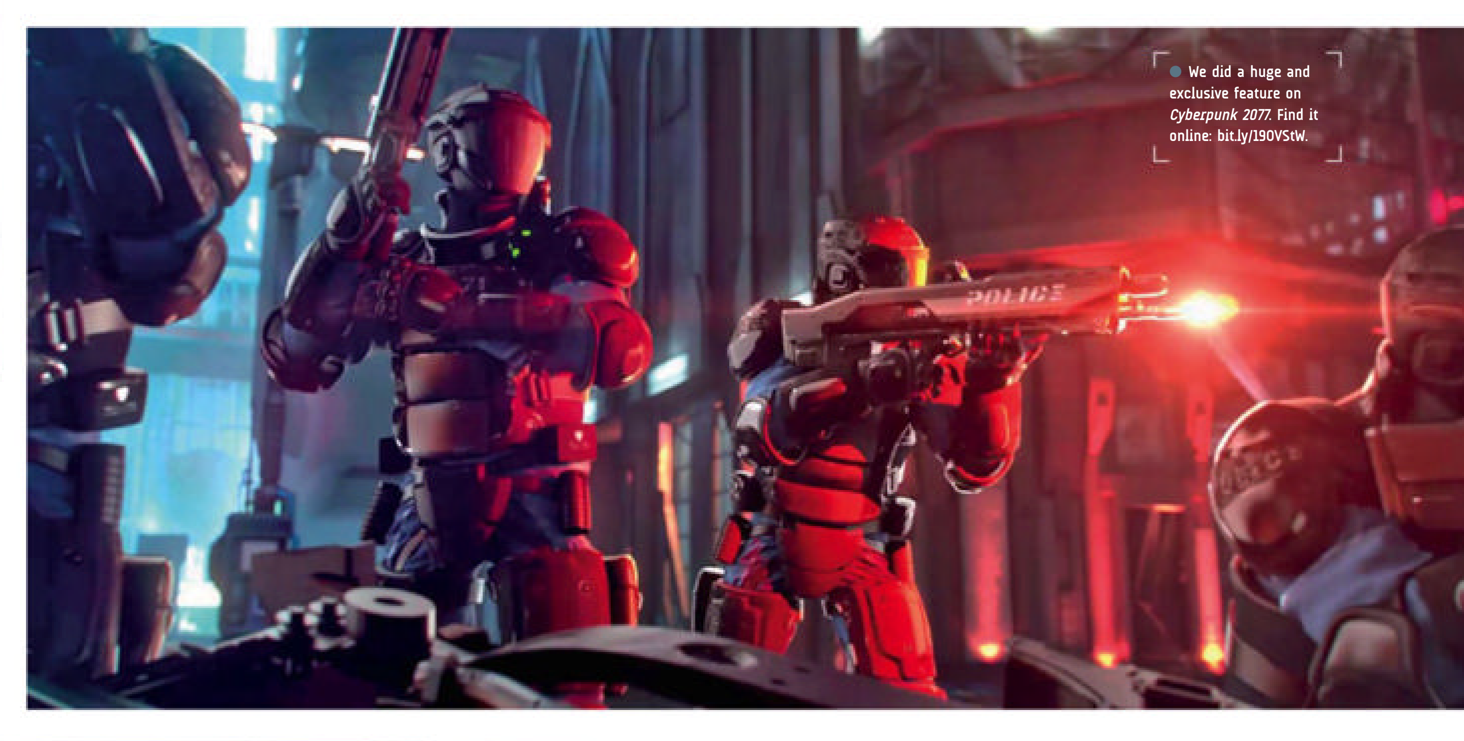
CYBERPUNK 2077

CD Projekt RED's RPG remit expands

While CD Projekt RED's adaptation of the pen-and-paper RPG wasn't demonstrated at E3, there was at least one video screen showcasing the trailer while a replica prop was displayed in the corner of the developer's room for *The Witcher 3*. That sort of counts, we suppose – and if nothing else, the spectacular demo of *The Witcher 3* showed just what kind of visual potential awaits us when this open-world sci-fi RPG finally gets its full unveiling in the future.

What's interesting is how CDPR has set an early standard for the high-fantasy RPG before the genre's elite (BioWare, Bethesda) have showed what they're able to do. It's a smart move – getting out there early with *Oblivion* and *Mass Effect* put both Bethesda and BioWare in a great position when it came to the perception of both franchises by gamers on then-new platforms. Even with much of Cyberpunk being shrouded in mystery at this stage, the very fact that it's in the public mindset bodes well for its chances at commercial success.

Like *The Witcher 3*, expect choices and the consequences that come with them to play a major role in the world of *Cyberpunk 2077*. That's what CD Projekt RED has proven it's good at so far, and we can only see that storytelling paradigm benefitting from a transition into a *Blade Runner*-like setting, built with the same ludicrous level of detail as the company's other upcoming RPG. Right now, the Polish developer stands to be a big winner in the next few years.



We did a huge and exclusive feature on *Cyberpunk 2077*. Find it online: bit.ly/19OVStW.





Publisher: EA **Developer:** DICE **Origin:** Sweden **Release:** TBA

MIRROR'S EDGE 2

Running wild, running free

One of the most welcome but also most expected unveilings at this year's E3 – following accidental appearances on two European branches of Amazon as well as EA's own online help site – *Mirror's Edge 2* looks set to return to the appealing minimalist art style of the original game, and once again follows the adventures of insurgent parkour courier Faith Connors.

The most encouraging aspect of the announcement was the boldly assertive exclamation that the game would only be released "when it's ready." The first *Mirror's Edge* was a fine piece of work, an unfairly criticised game that innovated in environmental design and slick first-person movement. The commitment to ensuring quality by not hastily announcing a release date for the sake of it is hopefully a sign that the sequel – or prequel, as this is apparently an origin story – will be as sharply-designed, since DICE hasn't caved to the banal calls to ditch combat altogether.

What's less clear is how the game will adapt to its new open-world structure. The environments in the first instalment were designed to lead you in one direction without ever making you feel like you were inanely jumping through hoops; small, brightly coloured pieces of scenery covertly gestured you on your way, so you always felt as if you were essentially problem-solving at speed. Some of the original's breathless immediacy is likely to be lost if you're constantly given too many pathways to choose from, but if you can't trust DICE (on peak form of late) to resolve complications like that, who can you trust?



Publisher: Activision Developer: Infinity Ward Origin: US Release Date: 5 November

CALL OF DUTY: GHOSTS

Pedigree chum

The dog's name is Riley. Whether or not Activision anticipated the level of attention the addition of a dog would garner in the wake of the next generation *Call Of Duty* unveiling, but, despite advanced-AI-driven fish, curvy textures and a requisite amount of bang, the publisher has seen fit to capitalise on the popularity of *Ghosts'* canine companion. After all, he is part of the triptych of emotional baggage that the player has to lumber throughout the eight-or-so hours of blowing the polygons out of whatever strays into the crosshairs; the third emotional pillar that is no doubt intended to pluck at the heartstrings of hardened veterans of virtual war.

He accompanies the two brothers operating with the elite band of *Ghosts* in the covert war to save the US, who find themselves infiltrating an enemy base dangling precariously off the edge of a ruined chunk of America. This offers a novel opportunity to slip inside the perspective of the dog, scouting ahead into enemy territory and furtively tackling any adversaries unfortunate enough to possess a jugular. This is achieved through a small camera attached to the dog's back, which transmits the footage back to the personal monitor of one of the brothers who is then able to direct Riley through the dilapidated environment. It's a mechanic that should sound familiar for anyone who has played through various permutations of this scenario in just about any *Call Of Duty* title over the last few years with the dog here essentially assuming the role of any remote-guided drone. Except it's a dog essentially in first-person, which makes the premise verge awkwardly towards unintentionally laughable.

But there's no denying the brutal effectiveness of controlling the hound, hiding in stretches of long grass before initiating a one-hit kill on unsuspecting enemies and clearing out whole areas without raising awareness.

We sense that there could be more advanced AI at the helm when Riley is left to his own devices; we see one of the brothers direct Riley to breach a building, which offers a twist on the conventional exploding-door-slo-mo nonsense we've seen numerous times.

We can't say that Riley represents a major formula revision – certainly not on the same scale as *Black Ops II* – but it's a satisfying addition to all the noisy stuff in the background. Good boy.

INSIGHT

Wonder why Sledgehammer Games isn't involved with the newest *Call Of Duty*? It's reportedly working on another mystery project.

You'll be able to take control of a dog in combat, like some kind of futuristic, awful Pavlov – for those times when a gun just won't get the job done.

Riley may look cute, but he has a mean streak; don't get on the wrong side of him.

Publisher: Konami **Developer:** Kojima Productions **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** 2014

METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

Hayter's gonna hate

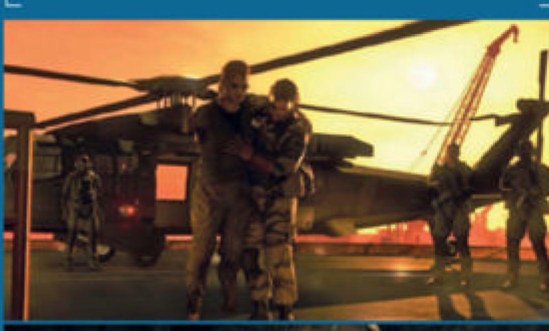
Goodbye David Hayter, hello Kiefer Sutherland. It was the bombshell that few would've predicted prior to Kojima's succinct prelude to *Metal Gear Solid V*'s larger E3 showcase, but it's confirmed that the *24* actor will take over the role of Snake in the sequel. The rationale behind the decision to replace Hayter – who has voiced the character in every English language appearance of the character since 1998 – is based on Kojima's bolstered ambition for *Metal Gear Solid V* to possess "a more subdued performance expressed through subtle facial movements and tone of voice rather than words," and that the character "needed someone who could genuinely convey both the facial and vocal qualities of a man in his late Forties." Presumably Kurt Russell was busy.

Kojima has big plans for the fifth mainline entry in the saga, though. Big Boss – ludicrously known in *Metal Gear Solid V* as Punished Snake (surely Perturbed Snake is up next) – is dispatched to Afghanistan in 1984 and from there the player is able to tackle missions freely inside a vivid open world backdrop. Watching Snake gallop across the Middle Eastern dustland stirs obvious comparisons to *Red Dead Redemption*, yet it retains *Metal Gear*'s innate mechanics that'll further the intense immersion of the conceit. That's seems to be the goal anyway, with *The Phantom Pain* ladling real-time weather effects and realistic passage of time over an already impressive roster of gameplay advancements – we're not sure whether the latter will drive players to wait until nightfall before tackling an enemy stronghold.

There's more to do but equally there's more to see. Previously Kojima discussed with **games™** the controversy he expected to court with *Metal Gear Solid V*'s mature themes and we've now been shown some of the gratuity and violence that the game will portray. Child soldiers trained to battle, scenes of mutilation and later torture at the hands of long-time series adversary Revolver Ocelot. Kojima stated in the pre-E3 presentation that he's striving for a subtler approach to storytelling in the sequel and this change of tack would seem necessary to portray these sensitive themes.

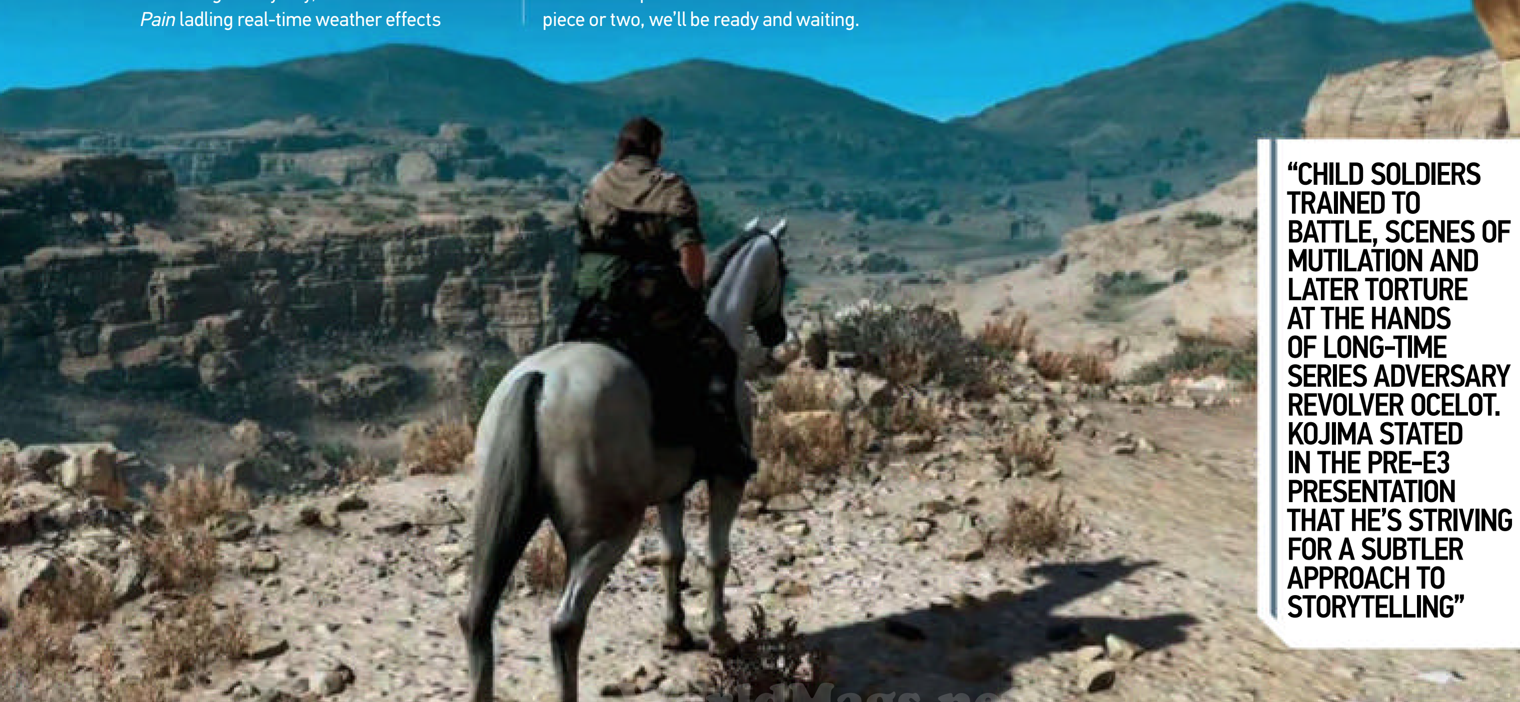
It's not all change, though. Major canonical characters such as Ocelot and Emmerich – Solid Snake's companion – make appearances and then there are the usual overwrought dialogue exchanges we've become so fond of over the years. The only real enigma left is the unhealthy amount of obfuscation surrounding the relationship between *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* and its purported prequel *Ground Zeroes*. That hot mess doesn't look like it'll be getting cleaned up in the immediate future, but we can all agree that whether the next chapter in *Metal Gear* arrives in one piece or two, we'll be ready and waiting.

The Phantom Pain will likely break Naked Snake, sending him on the road to becoming the maniacal Big Boss we know him to be.





Metal Gear Solid V was one of the best looking games showcased at E3. Welcome to next-gen.

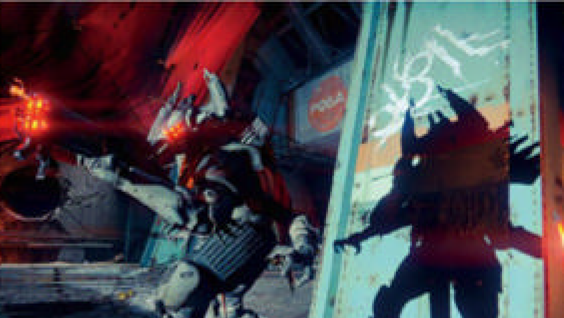


"CHILD SOLDIERS TRAINED TO BATTLE, SCENES OF MUTILATION AND LATER TORTURE AT THE HANDS OF LONG-TIME SERIES ADVERSARY REVOLVER OCELOT. KOJIMA STATED IN THE PRE-E3 PRESENTATION THAT HE'S STRIVING FOR A SUBTLER APPROACH TO STORYTELLING"





Incredibly well-realised though it is, there's little about *Destiny*'s art direction that doesn't feel familiar. A bit of *Warhammer 40,000* is in there.



Publisher: Activision **Developer:** Bungie **Origin:** USA **Release Date:** TBA 2014

DESTINY

Bungie president Harold Ryan discusses the gargantuan scope of its Halo successor in the game's proper reveal

If there's one unifying theme among developers heading into the next-generation it's that the MMO is set to preside on consoles. *Titanfall*, *The Division* and *Destiny* all share a common goal in establishing persistent, involving worlds to support thousands of players worldwide, and it's the latter that presents the grandest concepts. A vast sci-fi canvas that incorporates real-time narrative beats, momentous Public Events and a complex levelling system, all within an FPS, which the developer is well versed in.

We've only been given a short glimpse into the proposed ideas, barely scratching the surface with a few snippets of footage. **games™** turns to Bungie president Harold Ryan, to discuss exactly what we can expect from *Destiny* when it arrives in 2014.

It must be difficult to translate a concept on this scale in such small chunks of footage. Do you think that the vastness of Destiny has been grasped yet?

I don't think so. There's a *lot* to the game. Even with what we showed in the demo, we got to the end and we had seven people all playing in the same encounter. You've got player investment in there, you've got public matchmaking in there, co-operative gameplay events. What kind of story were those guys going on, what activities were they choosing as a team? That's just one narrow slice of the experience.

We showed a couple of the more combatant races in the montage at the end, and you can fight the race of The Fallen, the main enemy. To really get it, you need to play it. So lots of people have been 'Okay, we'll play!' and we've had to say 'Well, we're still pre-alpha code.' We did get seven players to work with the dedicated server onstage, which was unnerving. But there's a lot to *Destiny*, I think it's going to take a while for people to really understand the full scope of it.

> "ULTIMATELY IT'S A GAME WE'RE VERY FOCUSED ON DESIGNING FOR PEOPLE WHO JUST LOVE TO PLAY THE CURRENT GENERATION OF ONLINE SHOOTERS"
> Bungie president, Harold Ryan

Do you think that traditional console FPS fans will adapt to the framework of an MMO experience?

We're definitely very sensitive to the average, let's call them, *Halo* player, *COD* player, even players of *Oblivion* and games like that. We know they're not very patient and they want an action game, and the first thing *Destiny* is an action game. And so everything on top of it is a rich and deep plus, but if you want a great action game experience, you can pick up *Destiny* and play through a great action game. You're going to be presented with so many opportunities to progress your character, to care about how you look and how you customise yourself, and who you play with and how you play with them, but ultimately it's a game we're very focused on designing for people who just love to play the current generation of online shooters.

How do you balance different skill levels within events?

One of the reasons we showed the Public Event at the E3 demo is that you can see that there are a couple of low-level players, some teen-level players, a couple of twenty-level players, all sharing the same space, the same event. While there are activities where in order for it to be competitive you're going to have similar power levels for the group, there are also a ton of activities that have been designed for people to just be able jump in and play, no matter what their

INSIGHT

Destiny was teased as far back as 2009 in *Halo 3: ODST*. Bungie planted a cryptic image of a world accompanied by a white spherical shape with the line 'Destiny Awaits' in one of the title's levels.

level is. One of the things you didn't get a lot of in the demo is that you get loot appropriate for your character and for your level as well, so everyone who engages in that event is going to get compelling rewards for completing them.

What advantages have there been moving development to PlayStation 4 and Xbox One?
It was about increasing the scope of technology, because all of a sudden it made more sense to put more into some fundamental things that would allow us to expand the amount of interactivity that the player has with the game. For the artists on the team being able to build and paint to the scale the next-gen consoles can display, they're loving it. It turned out really well on the demo, I think, what has been nice and solid from a competitive point of view.

How have you tackled establishing a new science fiction universe?
When we started working on the *Destiny* universe, the first thing we did was to write a fictional background. You start off as you are now – a Guardian of The Tower – defending the wall that surrounds the last bastion of humanity, and the enemies are growing in strength. You start there and you start talking about how you ended up with that one last city, and what happened with peace. We spent years on it, with about eight or nine writers on the team. We married the concept of the story and the fiction to visual concepts, and that's how we ended up with things looking the way that they do. They're breathtaking. Sometimes I take them home and hang them on my wall. We have them all over the studio; people have our art up as their desktop.

How have you tried to create a realistic world, one that people will miss when they leave and want to come back to?
That was one of the core principles for *Destiny*; we wanted to create a place, a world that they would want to belong to. That it would be a hopeful place, a beautiful place, but full of intrigue and mystery. That's where we went. We went deep into fantasy and sci-fi, and pulled the two together. And I think the team we've assembled to pull it off from a visual point of view really nailed it.

E3 NO SHOW ROUND-UP


Publisher: Sony **Developer:** Team Ico
Origin: Japan **Release Date:** TBA

THE LAST GUARDIAN

● It's very likely that *The Last Guardian* will never see the light of day. Announced in 2009, and in development since 2007, it's becoming clear that the developers behind *Shadow Of The Colossus* unveiled its project before it was ready as it's now stuck in an "on hiatus" limbo state.


Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** In-house
Origin: France **Release Date:** TBA

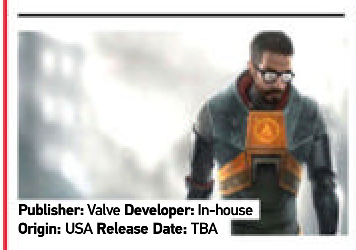
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2

● *Beyond Good & Evil 2* is still in development, Ubisoft will confirm that much. It seems Michel Ancel, Beyond's lead developer, is still too busy with the *Rayman* franchise to return to this beloved IP. Though with *Rayman Legends* almost out the door, we have fingers crossed for an E3 2014 reveal.


Publisher: Namco Bandai **Developer:** In-house
Origin: Japan **Release Date:** TBA

TEKKEN X STREET FIGHTER

● We have our suspicions that Katsuhiro Harada's *Tekken X Street Fighter* has been KO'd. Converting *Street Fighter* to work in *Tekken*'s 3D spaces was always going to be tough, and it seems Namco has plenty on the go collaborating with Nintendo on *Smash Bros* right now.


Publisher: Valve **Developer:** In-house
Origin: USA **Release Date:** TBA

HALF-LIFE 3

● Look, we know what you're thinking. But every year that goes past without Valve announcing the inevitable *Half-Life 3*, our hearts break a little. It'll come eventually. Gordon Freeman for E3 2014? We're not banking on it. As ever, Valve will reveal it when the time is absolutely right. In 2043...

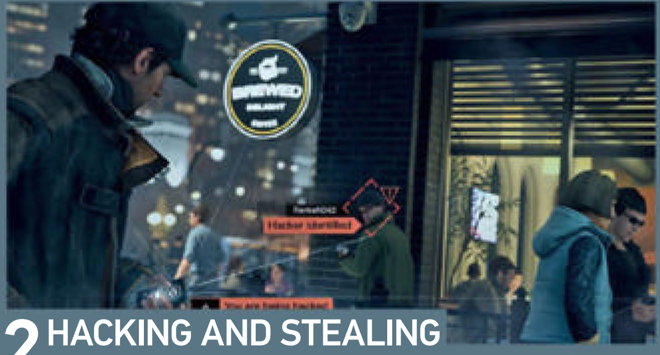
1 CONTROLLING THE CITY

Manipulating traffic lights and barriers while in a car, driving around, is a genuinely new idea that we haven't really seen anywhere else. Controlling the way the city operates using your mobile offers all-new tactical options during chases – kudos to Ubisoft for trying out something so ambitious.

Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** In-house **Origin:** Canada **Release Date:** November 2013

5 NEW IDEAS IN WATCH DOGS

Watch Dogs feels like more of an evolution than a revolution right now, but here are five ideas we haven't seen before in its open world…



2 HACKING AND STEALING

WE'RE SHOWN HOW hacking into a security network allows you to see into people's apartments – in this case via a young family's laptop – where you can hear some vague murmuring in the background that sheds a bit of light on who they are. There are countless stories like this in the city, apparently, which should open up some interesting narrative possibilities.



3 SOUND THE ALARM

DURING THE E3 demo we're shown, your character, Aiden Pearce, enters a gun shop to procure some firearms, when a news report comes on the TV screen behind the shop assistant outing Pearce as the rascal he is. You see the shopkeep's eyes get a bit shifty, and then Aiden kills him just as he raises the alarm. Unexpected and quite well-executed.



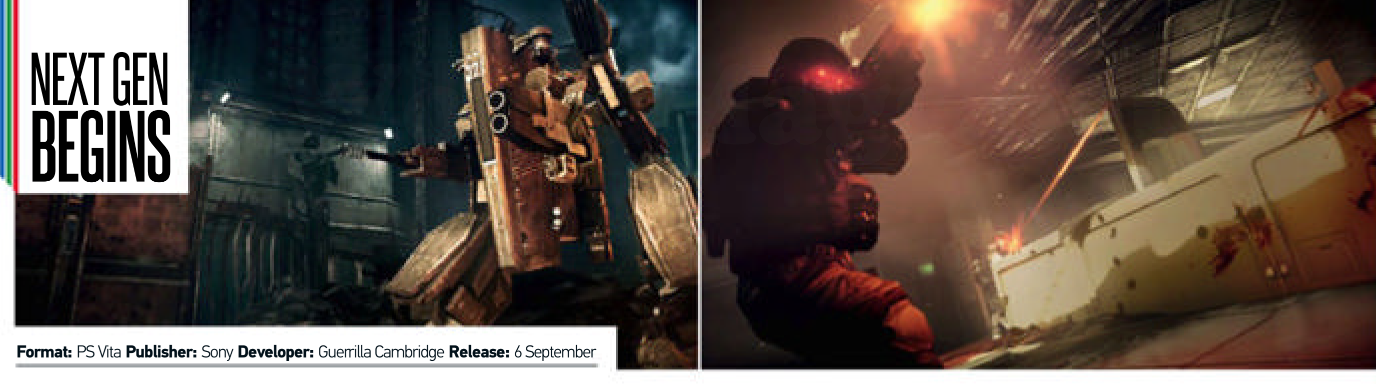
4 PEDESTRIANS WITH PERSONALITIES

WONDERING HOW ALL those people in *Watch Dogs* have names and so on? They're built from an enormous database of different values, and Ubisoft Montreal wants to keep things plausible when you see its backgrounds on show when walking through the streets of Chicago. They've also focused on the interesting parts of each person – stamp collecting just wouldn't do it for us.



5 BLACKOUTS

OKAY, LIGHT AND dark have been used prominently in videogames, usually in a capacity where you're manipulating light to find a stealthy way through a level. Being able to black out the entire area around you offers a more impressive method of escape than throwing a smoke bomb in *Assassin's Creed* or just legging it.



Format: PS Vita Publisher: Sony Developer: Guerrilla Cambridge Release: 6 September

KILLZONE: MERCENARY

Bringing the fight back

***Resistance: Burning Skies* made for a relatively uninspiring debut of the first-person shooter on PS Vita**, but it did outline the Vita competency as a platform for the genre. We've yet to see a title truly capitalise on that promise – even the omnipotence of *Call Of Duty* failed to succeed – but *Killzone: Mercenary* has a strong chance of delivering where the others have failed. *Mercenary* looks stunning, for starters. While PlayStation 4's upcoming *Killzone: Shadow Fall* seems to have shucked the gloomy milieu of previous entries, Mercenary bathes in muddy browns and piercing neon for its setting. Guerrilla Cambridge (formerly SCE Cambridge Studio) is also endeavouring to create a valid multiplayer experience aside from the campaign, with three different game modes, six maps and support for eight players. There's also a level of interactivity between the single-player missions and the multiplayer contingent, with cash earned in the campaign being carried over to online for weapon unlocks and perks.

Considering that to date the Vita has predominantly catered for catalogue enthusiasts and indie aficionados, *Killzone: Mercenary* not only looks like it'll deliver the long-awaited holy grail of portable FPSs, but a genuine triple-A experience on Sony's handheld.

TRIVIA

Killzone: Mercenary uses a modified version of the extremely impressive *Killzone 3* engine. Naturally, Guerrilla is looking to impress with its first Vita title, making the most of that lovely screen.



Format: PS Vita Publisher: Sony Developer: Media Molecule Release: 25 October

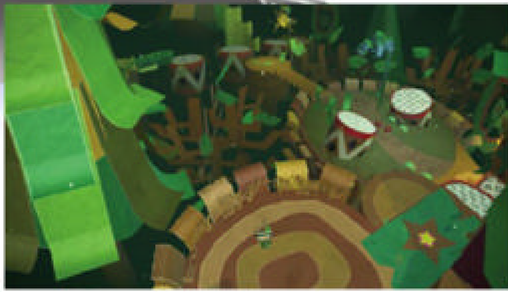
TEARAWAY

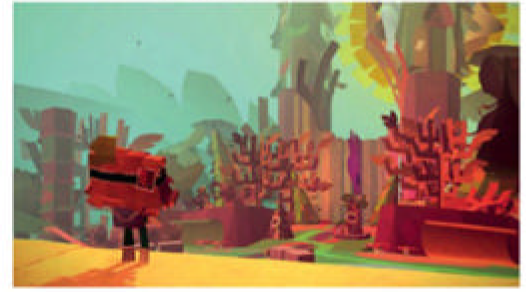
A cut above on Vita

It's fair to say that we've yet to see the full potential of the PS Vita realised. With its everything-and-the-kitchen-sink approach to hardware design, we've barely seen the use of the touch panels and gyroscopes beyond gimmicky design.

In other hands, *Tearaway* could have fallen into the same trap. But Media Molecule has crafted its whimsical paper-craft fantasy with a delicate touch, utilising the full gamut of the hardware's functionality without overstating its features. In one chapter the messenger is unable to jump, so in order to traverse the stage the player must tap the rear touch-pad to manipulate the scenery and launch the player through the world. It's just one instance of great design that both buoys the in-game universe and simultaneously complements the Vita, but admittedly there are other uses of the system's tech that aren't quite so ergonomic – the front touch-screen requires two hands to unwrap presents. Nevertheless, it's hard to find *Tearaway* anything but charming.

How can we not when it features a mini-game that involves using a pair of scissors to create a crown for an impish squirrel? It's unlikely to turn the fortunes of Sony's floundering portable console, but there's little question that *Tearaway* will set a high benchmark for all Vita games that follow it.





Inspired by Paris, we can only speculate as to whether every restaurant will be overpriced.

Format: 3DS **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Game Freak **Release:** 12 October

POKÉMON X AND Y

And I will try to catch you

There's no shortage of Nintendo titles crying out for reinvention, but *Pokémon* might just be in the most desperate state. So what do *X* and *Y* do to address growing concerns? Aside from the transition to 3D on Nintendo's latest handheld, the game is actually presented *in 3D*.

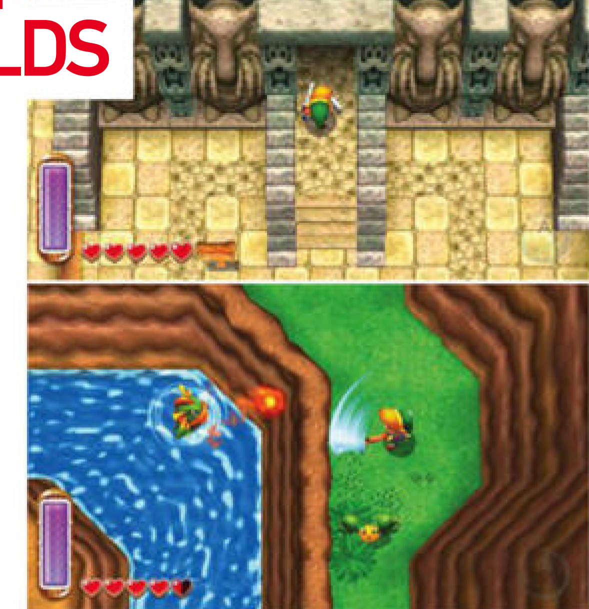
Environments, characters and battle sequences are now fully polygonal 3D graphics, the world itself now some Parisian-esque backdrop (replete with its own take on the Eiffel Tower) – the overworld map is a France-shaped landmass. It's only the second time that the *Pokémon* universe has stretched beyond Japan for inspiration (with *Black* and *White*'s Unova based on New York) but it lends the title a unique tone to match its enhanced aesthetics. There are a few other notable additions recently announced, including six new Pokémon species: Elikiteru, an electric lizard type, Gogoat, who is unsurprisingly a goat-like creature, Yancham, a panda-looking breed, Noivern, a sound wave Pokémon, a bug-like species named Vivillon and Yayakoma, which resembles a bird. There are also mounts, enabling the player to travel through the world atop a Pokémon.

Perhaps more enticing is the news that Game Freak is adding an 18th Pokémon type, Fairy – the first revealed is Sylveon, evolved from fan-favourite Eevee. But if it's progressive news you're after, then that'll be the addition of Pokémon interactions on the 3DS touchscreen, which will enable players to form a stronger bond with Pokémon by rubbing their faces and such. And, let's be honest, who could resist that prospect?

Format: 3DS **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** In-house **Release:** TBA 2013

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK BETWEEN WORLDS

One foot in the past



E3 didn't have a lot to say about the upcoming 3DS *Zelda* title, pitched as a spiritual successor to *Link To The Past* on SNES. What it did provide was a little clarity: it has an official title – *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds* – and we've a deeper insight into how the multi-layered environment will function in the game. Unlike previous top-down adventures in the series, Link has complete freedom to hop between platforms regardless of verticality.

There will also include certain locations that'll enable Link to collapse the flooring and reveal hidden portions of the dungeon or level. The most intriguing feature, previously revealed upon the title's announce, is Link's ability to transform into a wall painting, enabling him to squeeze through tight spots.

Nintendo clearly relishes the opportunity to layer some added depth into the template of this 2D revival, and the switch between 2D and 3D viewpoints affords it to explore some rich puzzle designs. It obviously looks and feels familiar, but *A Link Between Worlds* presents more than just a nostalgia trip, conjuring some new twists on the beloved series.

INSIGHT

Want some legal way to play *A Link To The Past* before *A Link Between Worlds* gets here? The original is coming to the Wii U Virtual Console in the near future, hopefully for a good price.

Each of the game's eighty monsters has its own set of special abilities and weaknesses, its own unique habitat, and each hunt promises to be completely different.

Publisher: TBC **Developer:** CD Projekt RED **Origin:** Poland **Release Date:** 2014

THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

Welcome to a world without barriers

The marvellous Xbox 360 port of *The Witcher 2* almost made that console feel like a piece of brand new hardware, so it should come as no surprise to find the follow-up sharing the accolades with Ubisoft's *The Division* as E3's most extravagant looking production. Running on a well-specced PC, it was impossible not to gaze awestruck at individual blades of grass twirling in the wind, at ominous grey clouds drifting across the skyline as night slowly moves near, and of the blazing sun beating down on the wooden houses of the Skellige Islands' Nordic region.

A more than healthy amount of smack was talked. Over one hundred hours of non-linear gameplay has been promised, and a claim that the world is thirty five times larger than the one that featured in *The Witcher 2*, was oft-touted. There are going to be three different epilogues, the fate of significant characters will determine what state you leave the world in at the game's climax (there are twelve distinct possibilities) and your adventure will culminate in one of thirty six possible endings. Dialogue trees are said to have been carefully refined, you'll be able to engage with over eighty different monsters during your quest, and the quantity of Geralt's combat animations has been hoisted from 20 in the previous game to ninety six here. *The Witcher 3* also won't feature a single quick-time event.

Far less enticing than all of that is the game's decision to implement a "Witcher Sense" that - you've guessed it - bears an uncanny resemblance to Batman's Detective ability. It's still under wraps for now, but we did see it being used to uncover an invisible set of power totems, that were responsible for one boss' seemingly unlimited pot of supernatural energy. Here's hoping that this unlikely tool only needs to be used occasionally, and that it doesn't inflect the tone of the action too much.

The game's creators are keen to stress that *The Witcher 3* is currently quite some way away from launch, and we're confident that the most arresting side of the game has yet to be revealed. For instance, the post-mission 'butterfly effect' is a primary focus this time around, and it's a system that has been explained like this: "Kill a merchant in one town, and see his trading partner in another go bankrupt from lack of goods." That kind of declaration is like catnip to any RPG fanatic, and hopefully the developer comes good on that stirring pledge. You can also use boats to travel around - a bizarre oversight in games of this kind, until now – and being able to gauge the state of the weather is intrinsic to your success at sea. This is looking like a stunning addition to the next-gen line-up, and may set the standard for *Elder Scrolls* and *Dragon Age* to beat.

"IF PLAYERS ENJOY MONSTER HUNTING OR DOING FIFTY HOURS OF SIDE QUESTS: THEY CAN DO THIS. BUT WITH EVERY STEP, THEY WILL KNOW THAT THEY'RE IN THE WORLD WHERE THE MAIN PLOT EXISTS"

Michal Platkow-Gilewski, CD Projekt Red



INSIGHT

The Witcher 3 is going for a much deeper level of realism this time around, at least in terms of the mechanics of the world itself. Flora, fauna, whole eco-systems will react to in-game events.

Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive **Developer:** Techland **Origin:** Poland **Release Date:** TBA

DYING LIGHT

Techland evolves its zombie-slashing antics

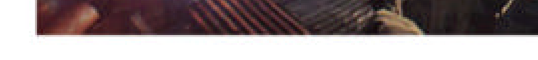
Techland has taken the *Dead Island* franchise as far as it can in its current form; *Riptide* for all of its fun, felt like it was treading water as we approached the next generation. Techland has since revealed it is working on a new first-person survival action game called *Dying Light*, a natural extension of everything that has come before it.

Dying Light has players navigating a vast open world in a desperate attempt to survive a land overrun by the dead. Interestingly, Techland is implementing a dynamic night and day cycle into the framework, with players encouraged to venture out of safe zones during the day to round-up supplies and craft weapons before the sun begins to set. The day is where you prepare for the horrors of the night, as once darkness envelops the sky *Dying Light* shifts its focus from exploration to survival. Enemies become immensely powerful, and players will need to utilise a variety of wild weaponry and twitchy trigger fingers to make it to the morning's first light.

The exploration elements of *Dead Island* were always a little dry, which Techland seems to have identified, as the developer is introducing a free running mechanic to help players quickly navigate the treacherous environment with a *Mirror's Edge* level of platforming precision.

Dying Light is coming to current and next generation systems in 2014, though we hope this gives Techland ample time to get the game through QA testing – we don't want another *Riptide* on our hands.

While *Dying Light* looks impressive, we are still a little cautious going into another Techland game. *Dead Island: Riptide* felt rushed, so hopefully the developer will give this the time it needs.







Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** Ivory Tower | Ubisoft Reflections **Origin:** UK **Release Date:** Early 2014

THE CREW

So solid driving

While EA continues to use its *Need For Speed* brand as an excuse to surreptitiously expand on Criterion's brilliant *Burnout* series, with *The Crew* Ubisoft has leapt in to satisfy the intense demand for something much more akin to 2003's *NFS: Underground* and its sequel. Set in a scaled-down recreation of the United States – which will allegedly take more than 90 minutes to drive across – *The Crew* takes place against the backdrop of America's illegal street racing landscape, and is positively obsessed with things like vehicle performance and aesthetic customisation.

The game's persistent online world is divided up into four distinct sections, all of which offer up unique terrain, vehicles and challenges. The campaign can be tackled alone – although in authentic MMO fashion, it's unplayable offline – but the emphasis is on teaming up with a four-person 'Crew' so that you can complete cooperative missions, and assist each other in pursuing the tougher single-player goals. The only co-op mission shown at E3 involved a four-way scramble to score a takedown, with the victor receiving a few bonus points: bonus points mean credits, and credits mean upgrades.

It's a smart way to incentivise people into playing together online, and the customisation options promise to be extensive. But original it most definitely isn't, and because it appears to feature licensed cars almost exclusively, it's probably safe to assume that hitting lamp posts and trees is going to result in a complete stop rather than a spot of pyrotechnic carnage. But if you continue to pine for another *Need for Speed: Underground*, this is one to keep both eyes trained on, come November.

Publisher: Bohemia Interactive **Developer:** In-house **Origin:** Czech Republic **Release Date:** TBA

DAYZ STANDALONE

The true face of fear

PC **Still shambling steadily towards its proposed 'Summer 2013' release, Dean Hall's *DayZ* standalone has not been forgotten.** E3 is never as kind to PC releases as it is to the rest of the industry, but cut through the hype, and this apocalypse simulator still continues to impress.

DayZ never struggled in the visual department, but the standalone has brought with it a host of improvements across the board. The state of Chernarus has been greatly expanded, with Bohemia confident that over 90 per cent of the buildings will be open for exploration. It only helps to increase the chance of survival – and confrontation. In *DayZ*, you never know what evil is lurking in the dark before its too late.

Alongside the standard improvements to character models and animation, we are also seeing a big improvement to the way items function. Map pieces must be found around the world to give you a complete idea of your surroundings, purifying pills can be combined with water on the move to quench your thirst and, interestingly, clothes will have a direct impact on your chance of survival out in the wild.

"THANKS TO THE MANY CHANGES, IT'S BECOMING UNMISSABLE FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO TEST THEIR SKILLS IN AN END OF THE WORLD SCENARIO"

● Dean Hall has already ruled out *DayZ* on Xbox One and Wii U, but he is interested in the PlayStation 4. Exciting times for those who feel inept without triggers beneath our fingers.

Shirts or jeans with pockets will slightly increase your inventory slots, while going out on a rainy night in nothing but a bare chest and shorts will see you your illness status affected accordingly. *DayZ Standalone* is quickly shaping up to be the ultimate survival horror game, and thanks to the large array of changes and improvements, it's becoming an unmissable experience for those who want to test their skills in an end of the world scenario.



Bohemia Interactive has already ironed out many of the issues found in the early alpha, with soldiers and weaponry handling unlike anything else in the shooter space.

Publisher: Bohemia Interactive **Developer:** In-house
Origin: Czech Republic **Release Date:** TBA

ARMA 3

The true face of war

PC **There comes a time in every player's life when they begin to question the depiction of war in military shooters like *Call Of Duty* and *Battlefield*, games that put more emphasis on bombast and scale than they do recreating the experience of getting your boots on the ground of a wartorn country.** When you're ready for an authentic battlefield simulation, *Arma 3* will be waiting.

Renowned for its realistic approach to modern warfare, Bohemia Interactive is returning to the trenches with *Arma 3*. As always, this is the closest anybody would want to get to war – the studio has easily constructed the most immersive tactical shooter to date.

When approaching *Arma 3*, however, Bohemia has clearly listened to feedback from the PC version of the game. Over-complex systems have been simplified; the core gameplay is easier to understand and the menus have been streamlined. The hardcore have nothing to fear, though; it doesn't take anything away from the experience, it's still incredibly tough, demanding only the best from its players, but the changes should hopefully mean that more players give *Arma* a try, instead of simply dismissing it from the outset.

As always, *Arma 3* will once again appeal to the niche hardcore audience that is one step away from marching down to a local recruitment centre, but it's clear Bohemia wants more players to get involved in its authentic simulation of the battlefield, and is taking the necessary steps to expand its reach. Rookie or veteran, *Arma 3* is shaping up to be an impressive tactical shooter in its own right.





Publisher: EA **Developer:** Ghost Games **Origin:** Sweden **Release Date:** November

NEED FOR SPEED RIVALS

The post-Criterion era starts here, not that you can tell

As a brand, *Need For Speed* is so confused and confusing these days it's hard to actually get a grasp of what it is. When Criterion is at the helm, *Need For Speed* has stood for two of the most complete and rewarding arcade racers of the past console generation. When anyone else gets behind the wheel, though, they metaphorically skid into Gosport harbour and collide with a fishing boat without a seatbelt.

EA is clearly keen to rectify this inconsistency, and with Criterion now out of the picture and possibly working on something without wheels, new studio Ghost Games have been handed the keys. There is crossover though – *Most Wanted* director Craig Sullivan is once again heading up the project, and his perfectionist's eye is as sure a sign as any that *Need For Speed Rivals* won't make the same mistakes as weaker entries *The Run* and *Undercover*.

The actual game itself appears pretty familiar, although absolutely gorgeous in a lovely next-gen way at the same time. The cops vs racers theme is central to the series, but here it takes on a slightly different personality. Both cops and racers can be controlled by connected players, and events can actually overlap with one another in real time and form one new event. It seems to be the theme of next-gen so far – new, bold, connected ways to play, all of which aren't being explained particularly well by their respective developers.

Still, even with that cloud of slight confusion hanging thick in the air, it's still easy to get behind *Rivals*. It moves at the pace you'd expect, but it really does look amazing. The series hasn't exactly been ugly, but seeing fully-modelled and reactive water splashing across the chassis of pin-sharp supercars, all moving at 180mph… well, it's quite something. As always, you'll actually barely see any of this stuff as your eyes fix themselves to the vanishing point – but there's no mistaking the sheen.

It's even more impressive when you consider *Need For Speed Rivals* is in an open world. The detail would be amazing for fixed-track racing, but here you can roam and locate events as you would in *Most Wanted*, or indeed *Burnout Paradise*, link up with your friends, battle against their times, and generally lose yourself in the kind of racing vortex that Criterion had previous made its own.

Ghost Games has a lot of pressure on its youthful shoulders here – *Need For Speed* hasn't been selling as well as it once did for a while, and would benefit from consistency to compete with the likes of *The Crew*, *DriveClub* and even the simulation boys, *Forza* and *Gran Turismo*. All signs suggest that *NFS* is up to the task of bringing a serious fight to its rivals.

> **"WE KNOW WE'RE NOT MAKING A SIMULATION. WE COULD MAKE A SIMULATION IF WE WANTED TO"**
> Craig Sullivan, EA



The water effects are some of the best we've ever seen, and the lighting and resolution are stunning. If this is what the first round of next-gen games looks like, then we're in.

INSIGHT
Ghost Games is the new name for EA Gothenburg, and a racing-specific studio created to maintain *Need For Speed*'s momentum. Its staff come from many acclaimed racing studios.

SPORTS GAMES ROUND-UP



Publisher: EA Sports **Developer:** In-house **Origin:** USA **Release Date:** November 2013

FIFA 14

● *FIFA* has a history of struggling at generation shifts – *Road To The World Cup 2006*, anyone? – but *FIFA 14* plays as well as the current iteration of games. It's likely we won't see *FIFA* take advantage of the next-gen immediately, but *FIFA 14* is a solid step forward.



Publisher: Konami **Developer:** In-house **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** November 2013

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2014

● For an entire console cycle, *Pro Evolution Soccer* has been forced to witness rival *FIFA* thrive. In the final minutes of the generation, Konami has announced it is redesigning *Pro Evolution*, on Hideo Kojima's Fox Engine.



Publisher: EA Sports **Developer:** In-house **Origin:** USA **Release Date:** 2014

NBA LIVE 14

● *NBA Live* has spent three years on the bench, with EA re-evaluating its position in its sports portfolio. Coming exclusively to next-gen systems, *NBA Live 14* is built using EA's Ignite engine; it's visually impressive, with fluid movement and tight handling.



Publisher: EA Sports **Developer:** EA **Origin:** USA **Release Date:** 2013

MADDEN NFL 25

● *NFL* is making the jump to next-gen systems, but the improvements aren't immediately apparent. EA is spending a lot of its development time overhauling the pass blocking and targeting systems, but *Madden NFL 25* is still in need of a visual polish.

Tom Hardy stars in the *Mad Max* film released next year. This isn't him.

Publisher: Warner Bros. **Developer:** Avalanche Studios
Origin: Sweden **Release Date:** TBA 2014

MAD MAX

He rules the roads, skies and just about everything

When someone says *Mad Max* what do you think of? Mel Gibson embodying the quintessential antihero? The Pursuit Special (aka Max's custom Ford Falcon XB sedan)? Or, perhaps, Tina Turner's relentless warbling? Well, think again. Avalanche Studios has dropped the Aussie, ditched the iconic car and persisted even with a noticeable lack of Eighties pop divas present. However, this is very much the world from the films. While it has no direct connection to the events in any of the movies to date (including, apparently, the upcoming Tom Hardy-starring third sequel), the barren post-apocalyptic outback is littered with unsavoury types scrapping over diminishing resources.

It carries the same petrolhead mentality, boasting more than 50 vehicles littered throughout the open-world adventure that can be commandeered, but, much like its source, it's one particular automotive that Max finds himself intimately attached to: the Magnum Opus. Starting as a basic set of wheels. Max needs to craft his new car throughout the game with a range of modifications to the engine, ramming abilities, chassis and even its hunchback mechanic Chumbucket. There's an extensive list of upgrades that need to be balanced – for instance, welding a fierce grill to the front of the ride will weight down the front suspension significantly.

"IT'S A SAVAGE WILDERNESS THAT WILL THRIVE THROUGH AVALANCHE'S PEDIGREE TO CONSTRUCT INVITING OPEN-WORLDS THAT ENCOURAGE CHAOTIC DESTRUCTION"

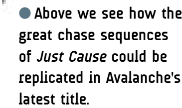
It's not just the vehicles that return, as gratuitous violence (another staple of the series) takes a not-so-subtle bow. Vehicular warfare constitutes much of the title's combat; enemies cling to the Magnum Opus, actively trying to gauge Max's eyes out. Max can either manually shoot them or ram them into other vehicles, but there's also a slow-motion mechanic that enables you to drive beside another vehicle and unleash your shotgun. The harpoon gun also returns, not from *Mad Max*, but from Avalanche's own *Just Cause* sequence. This practical (albeit comical) weapon is able to attach two objects together – a human to the back of a speeding automobile is a particular favourite of ours.

And continuing the theme of excessive violence is the explicit melee combat system outside of the driving seat. In much the same way as *The Last Of Us*, there's a brutal tone to hand-to-hand combat, meaning bricks, knives and other blunt objects are fair game in this harsh survivalist backdrop. But it's not all grim, there's an electric prod that Max can use to impale enemies before it explodes.

It's a savage wilderness then, but one that'll thrive through Avalanche's pedigree to construct inviting open-worlds that encourage exploration and a healthy amount of chaotic disruption. We don't need another half-baked licence game, but a boisterous, vicious and expansive open-world adventure… even Tina Turner couldn't resist that.

INSIGHT

This is the first of two licensed games that Avalanche has confirmed it's working on, with the other based on a comic book licence, apparently. Wouldn't *Superman* be a great fit for Avalanche?





Above we see how the great chase sequences of *Just Cause* could be replicated in Avalanche's latest title.

Mad Max is a tremendous match for an open-world game. *Just Cause*'s weakness as a series so far is lacking detail within the immense scale of its tropical environments.



THIEF

Publisher: Square Enix Developer: Eidos Montreal Origin: Canada Release Date: 2014

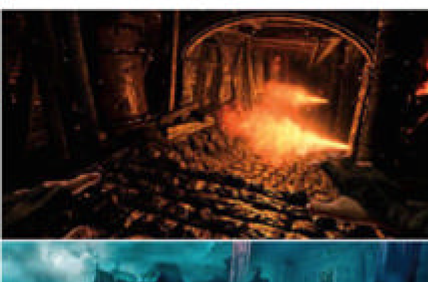
What's yours is now his. Garrett returns to the shadows

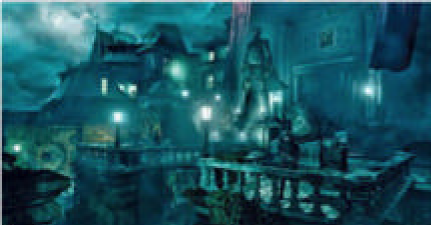
***Thief*'s E3 demo takes place several hours into the main story, and tasks you with stealing a precious gemstone known as the Heart of the Lion.** The fortress-like premises that need to be infiltrated are at the epicentre of a town riot, and the guards on the inside are sketchy and on-edge. Their absent-mindedness seems like a plus at first, but lessons are learned very quickly indeed: this is an inexorably difficult game, and facing off against more than one enemy at a time is a perfect recipe for almost supersonic death.

True to series form, the key to avoiding confrontation involves almost permanently skulking around in the darkness; stepping outside it for just a couple of brief seconds is enough to alert your adversaries to your presence. So the difficulty tier basically strong-arms you into embracing experimentation, and before long we were side-stepping confrontation altogether via Garrett's nifty ability to scale walls, and spotting traps with the helpful Focus tool. We also used water arrows to douse flames (the original game's crucial rope arrows return also) and executed a pin-point headshot thanks to another quick blast of Focus. The catch-all Focus ability can also be used to see the sound of footsteps bouncing through walls, but unlike in *Dishonored*, transparent audio bubbles (that quickly dissipate) are all that's visible to you. Apprehensive franchise devotees definitely shouldn't panic though, because this *Thief* has been specifically designed to work without Focus, and the skill can be completely switched off in the menus.

Once you're actually inside the Baron's castle the game adopts a gripping puzzle-box structure; the interiors are vast and serpentine, littered with tripwires and environmental bamboozlers, and we're assured that clues are absolutely everywhere. So in addition to the more traditional form of trial-and-error exploration, you'll also be able to discern the location of the Heart of the Lion simply by snooping around for textual collectibles and exposition.

Perhaps inevitably for a game that unquestionably resembles the action-centric *Dishonored*, the demo climaxes with an ostentatious action sequence, and on reflection there's something a tad wet about how Garrett's arrows currently shatter on impact, leaving no trace of your presence and perhaps encouraging you to do your killing a mite too indiscriminately. But on the whole, the well-regulated mish-mash of stealth, puzzling and tapered-off action scenes just plain works. Unlike in the previous games there's no third-person camera option (context-sensitive action beats aside) but the fact that the game's stabilisers can be removed is a respectful and essential nod towards the hardcore.





● *Thief* offered multiple routes throughout our demo, for those worried the game would fall short in this regard.

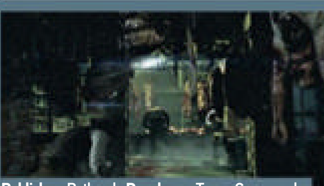
NEXT-GEN ROUND-UP



Publisher: PlayStation 4, PC Developer: In-house Origin: US Release Date: 2013

PLANETSIDE 2

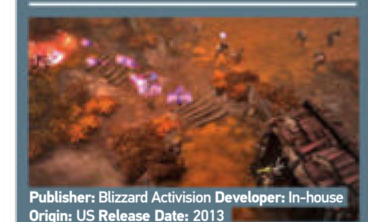
● *PlanetSide 2* is making the jump to PlayStation 4, bringing massively multiplayer antics to consoles in ways *MAG* could barely dream of. Thankfully, *PlanetSide 2* will work outside of the PS-Plus requirements, allowing all owners to enjoy the huge free-to-play battlefield on launch.



Publisher: Bethesda Developer: Tango Gameworks Origin: Japan Gameworks Release Date: 2014

THE EVIL WITHIN

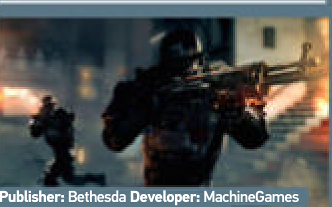
● Shinji Mikami's *The Evil Within* is horror evolved, and while it is coming to current-gen systems, it looks insanely creepy on Xbox One and PS4. Dripping with atmosphere, and brimming with genuine scares throughout, *The Evil Within* is kickstarting the revival of a long dormant genre.



Publisher: Blizzard Activision Developer: In-house Origin: US Release Date: 2013

DIABLO III

● Against all expectation, *Diablo III* is making a successful transition to consoles. None of the depth has been lost, though aspects have been redesigned to work within the restraint of a gamepad. If you were upset by the DRM and auction house, then this certainly worth a look.



Publisher: Bethesda Developer: MachineGames Origin: Sweden Release Date: 2013

WOLFENSTEIN: THE NEW ORDER

● *Wolfenstein* has become a bit of a laughing stock in the genre, but *The New Order* is hoping to change that. Set in a world where the Nazis won, it's essentially a reboot and will appease any that have grown weary of the franchise.

NEXT GEN BEGINS INDIE SHOWCASE

OCTODAD: DADLIEST CATCH

Format: PC, PS4
Developer: Young Horses
ETA: Q4 2013



REGULAR READERS will likely know how we love to champion the intentionally awful controls and ingenious premise of *Octodad*, but we never in our wildest dreams thought we'd see the cephalopod trickster at an E3 press conference. Yet there he was, real as an octopus in an ill-fitting suit can be. Somehow, the clumsy control scheme makes even more (well, less) sense on a traditional controller, turning *Dark Souls* veterans and utter beginners alike into bumbling morons.

FEZ II

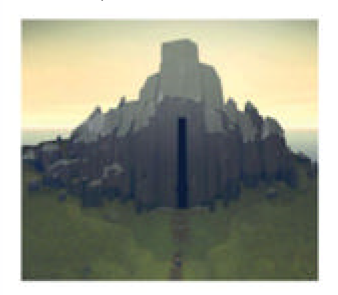
Format: TBC
Developer: Polytron
ETA: 2014



OKAY, SO THAT ETA is a little generous given how long the original was in the works. But with the groundwork in place, all Phil Fish and his crew need to do is come up with more mind-melting spatial puzzles and fit them into the same template. We defy anyone who enjoyed the original to claim that more of the same wouldn't be enough in this case – rather that than we wait until 2018. Too bad the teaser trailer gives as much away about it as you can learn by *not* watching the trailer.

BELOW

Format: Xbox One
Developer: Capybara Games
ETA: Q4 2013



WHILE *DEAD RISING* was the one game the PlayStation faithful were gutted to see papped on holiday with Microsoft, this beautiful little oddity will likely have been a close second for many. Capybara's renown is far from undeserved and this zoomed-out, top-down roguelike proves exactly why – with lush visuals, tight design and a no-nonsense hardcore slant, this is a game that will refuse to hold your hand no matter how nicely you may ask.

TRANSISTOR

Format: PC, PS4
Developer: Supergiant Games
ETA: 2014



A SEEMINGLY PERFECT counterpoint to Capy's pledge of loyalty to Microsoft, *Transistor* offers PS4 and PC gamers a slightly more traditional action-RPG experience albeit with a similarly distant and clean look. Pretty much the full *Bastion* team returns – down to narrator Logan Cunningham, who this time voices a speaking sword – and the same production values are all present and correct. If the next-gen war is to be won with indie support, it's way too close to call at this point.

LOVERS IN A DANGEROUS SPACETIME

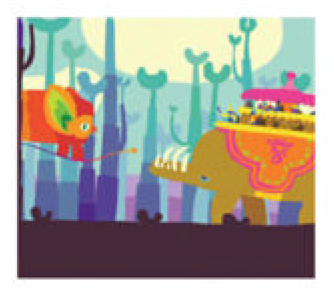
Format: PC
Developer: Asteroid Base
ETA: Q3 2013



WHO DOESN'T love a good co-op game? *Lovers* taps into that purest part of gameplay teamwork – the part where working together in perfect harmony is more important than personal triumph – and places two allies on a small space station, where they must man thrusters, shields and guns in tandem in order to survive endless waves of enemies and obstacles. Expect to lose friends if your co-op partner isn't up to snuff and to lose hours if they are.

HOHOKUM

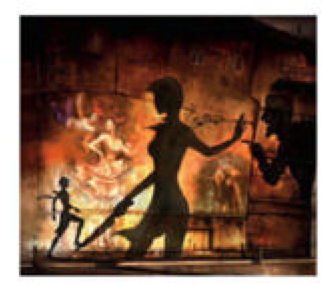
Format: PS3, PS4, Vita
Developer: Honeyslug
ETA: Q3 2013



THERE'S NOT A toff to be squashed or a pudding to be delivered in this curious new game from the *Frobisher Says* team. Some dastardly fusion of *Sound Shapes*, *Noby Noby Boy* and *Journey*, it's a freeform exploration game where players snake through a gorgeous world in search of organic challenges and more traditional (if not conveyed as such) objectives in search of… well, something. Enlightenment, maybe? Or fun? Yeah, it's probably fun.

CONTRAST

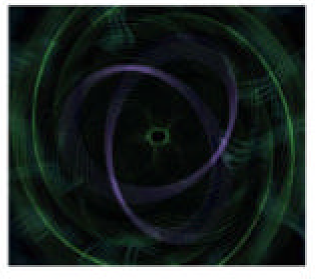
Format: PC, PS3, PS4, Xbox 360
Developer: Compulsion Games
ETA: Q4 2013



WHAT IF *LIMBO* wasn't so grim and took place in the Twenties? Despite that being a question nobody asked, it's one that this stylish platformer looks to answer all the same. The oddly-garbed protagonist leaps from real world to shadows, the latter proving tricky as the shadow world bends and warps based on numerous moving light sources. The beautiful art style makes it an interesting proposition, whether you're a platforming fan or not.

SOUNDSELF

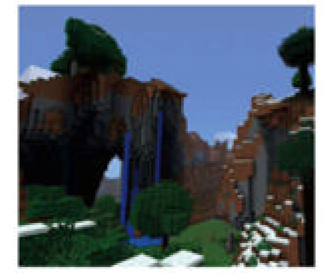
Format: Mac, PC
Developer: Robin Arnott
ETA: 2014



THE LINE BETWEEN game and experience continues to blur, this voice-controlled journey through every visualiser ever a perfect example. It presents a changing world to explore and an utterly unique digital avenue to mouth your way along, and one that is made all the more fascinating and involving thanks to Oculus Rift support. It might not be the 'game' that makes you buy one, but it's a captivating advert for the rebirth of VR.

MINECRAFT

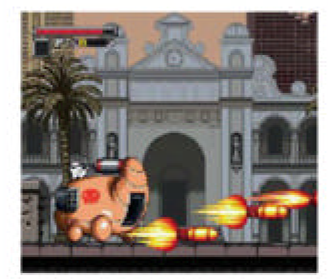
Format: **Xbox One**
Developer: **Mojang**
ETA: **Q4 2013**



IF YOU'RE STILL in any doubt as to whether Notch's blocky vision of the future is one that you share, you'll have another chance to get on board with the launch of the Xbox One. News that saves most likely won't carry over from 360 to One versions will likely crush the dreams of many an ardent miner (there's still a glimmer of hope for this feature, mind) but with reports that it'll be an all-new mining experience, it's hard to stay mad for long.

MERCENARY KINGS

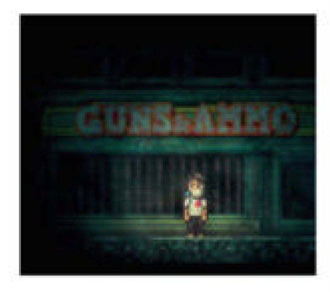
Format: **PC, PS4**
Developer: **Tribute Games**
ETA: **Q4 2013**



THE *SCOTT PILGRIM* team tries its hand with an 'open-world *Contra*' with its latest project, a 2D shooter on a scale like you've never seen before. Upgradeable weapons, random loot drops and four-player co-op come together to create a stylish side-scroller, akin in theory to *Borderlands* – it's far from the most original game in principle but it's a great example of how old and new mechanics can be fused to create something far greater.

LONE SURVIVOR

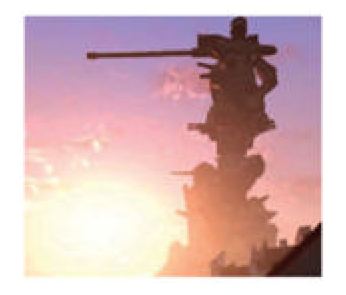
Format: **Vita**
Developer: **Jasper Byrne**
ETA: **Q3 2013**



LAST YEAR'S PC curio is now heading to Vita, perhaps the perfect platform for its captivating pixel art take on survival horror. There are notes of *Silent Hill* and even early *Resident Evil* in its design, with its creator busy adding a bunch of new features and narrative twists in order to create the definitive version of this bleak little game. It looks gorgeous on Vita's OLED screen too, although we doubt that the art style will sit well with everyone.

TOWER OF GUNS

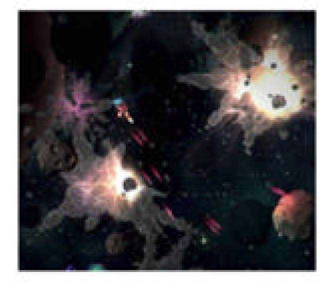
Format: **PC**
Developer: **Terrible Posture Games**
ETA: **2014**



A CONCISE YET incredibly ambitious roguelike FPS, *Tower Of Guns* looks to cram into an hour or two everything that *Borderlands* does in hundreds. Everything is randomly generated – from weapons and power-ups to enemies and entire levels – and with each having a huge impact on the rest in such a short-form experience, the weathered boast that no two runs will be alike might actually carry some weight on this occasion.

GALAK-Z

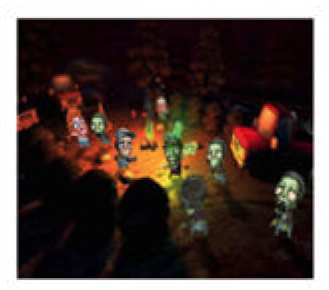
Format: **PS4**
Developer: **17-bit**
ETA: **2014**



LEAVE IT TO the guys behind the rather excellent *Skulls Of The Shogun* to find a way to spin an old record and make it play a new song. *Galak-Z* might look like a million other coin-op shooters but it takes inspiration from the modern FPS experience in briefing its enemies – opposing ships behave tactically rather than rushing the player, retreating to regroup or charge shields or exploiting your weaknesses and moments of panic. Awesome.

RAY'S THE DEAD

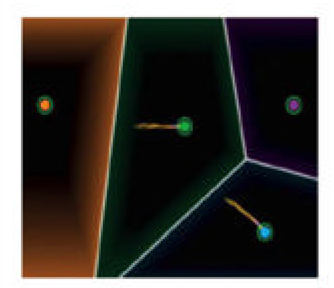
Format: **Mac, PC, PS4**
Developer: **Ragtag Studio**
ETA: **Q4 2013**



A NEWLY-TURNED zombie recruits an army of similarly braindead chums and goes about wreaking havoc… what could possibly go wrong? Gameplay will take the form of *Pikmin*-esque real time strategy, while the design follows the same kind of Eighties aesthetic that recently worked so well for *Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon.* There's quite a real chance we'll finally be tired of zombies by the time this launches, but hopefully we'll still have a little something left…

VORONOID

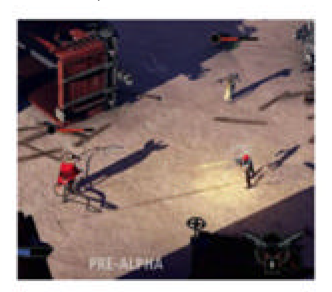
Format: **PC**
Developer: **Zach Aikman**
ETA: **Q4 2013**



GEOMETRY WARS' abstract cousin, *Voronoid* is a game of spatial control and one in which multiplayer battles can get *incredibly* heated. The shifting play space rewards the player that can claim the largest sector, with King Of The Hill-style rushes occurring whenever it looks like someone might be pulling out in front. It's fast, frenetic and fun and given that it works best on controllers, we'd love to see it come to console.

SECRET PONCHOS

Format: **PS4**
Developer: **Switchblade Monkeys**
ETA: **Q4 2013**



AN ONLINE multiplayer Wild West shooter where customisation and teamwork are as important as having the reactions to win a shootout. The viewpoint evokes the original *Fallout* games (never a bad thing) while the potential for assembling your own posse and asserting your prowess over other similarly blinkered groups sounds brilliant. Here's hoping the combat is good enough to back up the ideas and mechanics elsewhere.

CURRENT-GEN ROUND-UP

ALONGSIDE THE DELUGE OF NEXT-GEN TITLES, THE FINAL REMNANTS OF THIS GENERATION MADE AN EQUALLY IMPRESSIVE APPEARANCE...

HISTORY

The most famous Batman origin is Frank Miller's *Year One*, which *Arkham Origins* is no doubt taking some cues from when it comes to capturing his early years.

Publisher: Namco Bandai **Developer:** From Software **Origin:** Japan **Release Date:** March 2014

DARK SOULS II

Eternal darkness

The Mirror Knight is not the most imposing figure to ever stray into the netherworld of From Software's *Souls* series. He looks, frankly, a little by-the-numbers in design: a shimmering crystal golem wielding a lightning sword standing tall atop the ruins of a castle, enduring the raging storm battering against his armour. Its hardly Smough and Ornstein. Yet, like all things in *Dark Souls*, looks can be deceiving. He takes a back step, thrusting his ornate mirror shield ahead and conjures a shadowy figure within the reflective surface. A black knight has been summoned who steps out of the shield and into the arena. Now *that* we did not expect.

The ensuing battle is intense, the Mirror Knight casting lighting bolts and drives his blade towards our hero during recovery and healing. After all the talk of a more 'accessible' *Souls* experience, the truth is quite the contrary. Enemy AI has been overhauled extensively, with enemies making smarter battle choices based on your behaviour – such as attacking while healing and sweeping your legs if you lock yourself in a defensive stance.

There are concessions made to dispense with some of the obfuscation regarding systems, most notably in how players pick their class. Instead of deciding a class from the offset, you answer a series of questions that'll then allot stats based on your decisions and playstyle. Another fundamental modification is warping between Bonfires, which will be available from the beginning of the game.

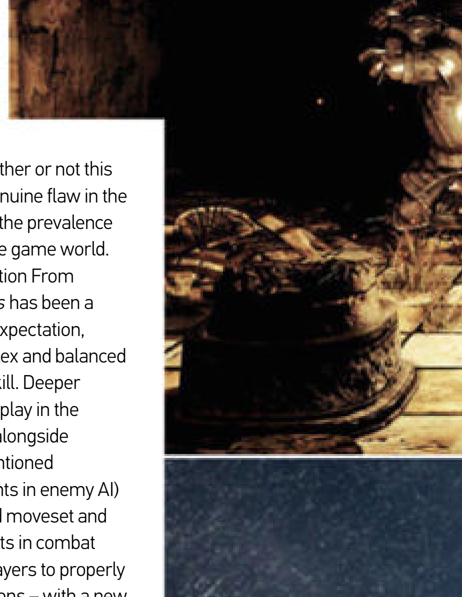
But that's not to say we didn't have any concerns. In addition to the Estus Flasks and magic allowance, lifegems and herbs can be used to gradually restore both health and magic. It's a divisive inclusion and risks stripping the intensity and tension from boss encounters if players are savvy enough to stock up on items prior to entering the fog gate. Whether or not this fear will materialise into a genuine flaw in the final product will be down to the prevalence of these items throughout the game world.

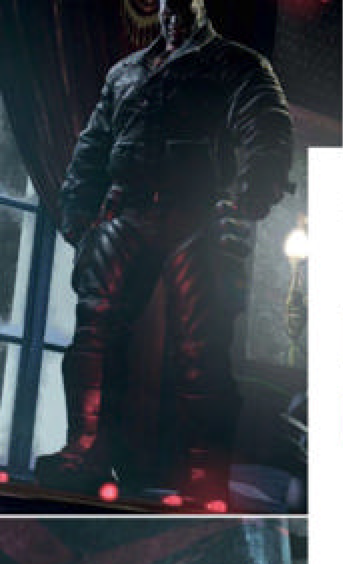
HISTORY

Dark Souls sold 2.3 million copies on Xbox 360, PS3 and PC, which isn't massive next to the blockbuster titles, yet is amazing considering how niche it is.

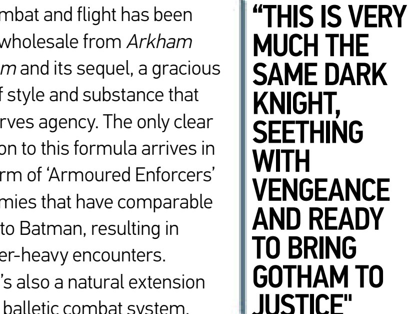
It feels imprudent to question From Software's ability; *Dark Souls* has been a franchise that often defies expectation, offering a rich, complex and balanced tournament of skill. Deeper systems are at play in the sequel with (alongside the aforementioned advancements in enemy AI) an expanded moveset and enhancements in combat that enable players to properly dual-wield weapons – with a new stance to support this playstyle.

And as the Mirror Knight has proven, there's no lack of challenge. In fact, with enemies that can play dead, adaptive bosses and fiendish environmental traps, there's every chance that this could be *even harder*. Sweat glands will be working overtime.









Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive **Developer:** Warner Bros. Montreal **Origin:** Canada **Release Date:** 25 October

BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS

Who I am, how I came to be

You'll be pleased to hear that Batman hasn't lost any of his pugilistic might, nor has he suddenly adopted rollerblades and a floral bonnet. Rocksteady might have stepped back from development on *Batman: Arkham Origins* (perhaps – hopefully – brewing its own new instalment featuring the Justice League) but Warner Bros. Montreal clearly knows its cape from its cowl when it comes to delivering a sequel authentic to the original developer's intentions.

Combat and flight has been lifted wholesale from *Arkham Asylum* and its sequel, a gracious mix of style and substance that preserves agency. The only clear addition to this formula arrives in the form of 'Armoured Enforcers' – enemies that have comparable skills to Batman, resulting in counter-heavy encounters. There's also a natural extension to the balletic combat system, with a grading system awarding a score after each fight that remunerates bonus XP to spent outfitting your Caped Crusader the way you see fit.

There's also a concerted effort to make Gotham – of which the game encompasses more of its topography – buzz with a sense of chaos, with randomly-generated crimes cropping up across the city as part of a new 'Crime-in-Progress' HUD system. In fact, detective work is a much more prominent feature in the prequel. Scanning scenes and utilising Detective Mode has been a core facet of the *Arkham* make-up, but the Case File system buffs the concept significantly. As a helicopter crashes to the ground in one scenario, Batman must piece together evidence to deduce how the incident occurred. In a similar fashion to *Remember Me*, Batman can scrub through the event, pausing to analyse specific points of interest. In this chapter the investigation culminates in the revelation that the helicopter crash was caused by one of Deadshot's bullets, sending Batman on the trail of the hitman, but these short (roughly a few minutes each) puzzles serve as an interesting divergence from the main structure.

"THIS IS VERY MUCH THE SAME DARK KNIGHT, SEETHING WITH VENGEANCE AND READY TO BRING GOTHAM TO JUSTICE"

There's certainly an 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it' attitude surrounding *Arkham Origins*. Like its predecessors, the story takes place over the course of one night, here Christmas Eve which pitches the title as somewhere between *Batman Returns* and any Shane Black movie. And there's certainly some recycling of major villains, with Joker, Bane, Deadshot and Penguin are fighting for dominance of the city streets in the wake of a $50 million bounty place on Batman's head by Black Mask. It's clear that, despite the lack of Rocksteady at the helm, this is very much the same Dark Knight, seething with vengeance and ready to bring Gotham to justice. There's also no Robin, even more reason to celebrate (we kid, he was great in *Arkham City*).

Despite not coming to next-gen consoles, gamers will definitely seek out *Dark Souls II*.

CURRENT-GEN ROUND-UP



Format: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: Obsidian Origin: US Release: Q4 2013

SOUTH PARK: THE STICK OF TRUTH

Poo jokes abound!

Fears that Ubisoft would neuter the inimitable humour of Trey Parker and Matt Stone's have proven unfounded – *South Park: The Stick Of Truth* is truly the debauched offspring of its notorious creators. Within moments of starting the game f-bombs and faecal-based weaponry sit comfortable alongside its authentically crude aesthetics, creating a pixel-perfect feel to the recreation of *South Park*. It also wastes no time in ascertaining the credentials of its veteran RPG developer, Obsidian Entertainment.

One portion of the title pits players in the midst of a town-wide LARP game within the hallways of South Park Elementary, where players encounter hordes of elves, humans and goths battling between classrooms. You can tackle enemies in straightforward turn-based combat, or by utilising contextual environmental traps and weapon crafting – the latter involving dropping a deuce in a lavatory before lobbing it as an explosive. Obviously things haven't progressed *that* much since *South Park*'s Nintendo 64 outing.

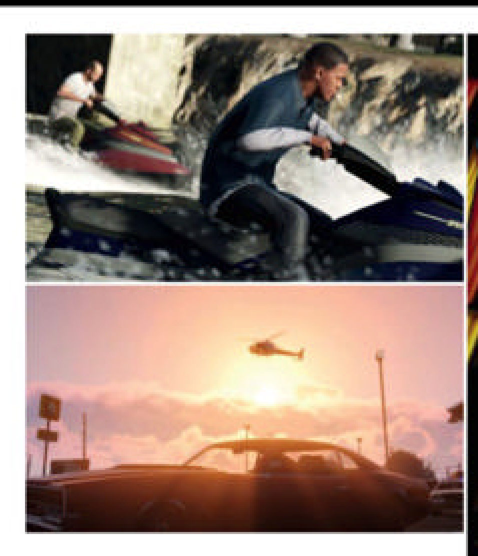
Format: PlayStation 3 Publisher: Sony Developer: Quantic Dream Origin: France Release: 11 October

BEYOND: TWO SOULS

Ghost in the shell

If *Heavy Rain* was David Cage's ode to pitch-black noir, then *Beyond: Two Souls* is the director's attempt at capturing the essence of big-budget, big-idea concept cinema. Ellen Page's Jodie Holmes possesses supernatural abilities, accompanied by a spectral companion named Aiden, and the two soon find themselves dispatched to Mogadishu by the CIA on the hunt for a warlord named Jamal. *Beyond*'s environments promote freedom above *Heavy Rain*'s pockets of fenced-in exploration. Jodie can creep around a sizeable compound to accomplish her mission, subduing enemies either herself or through Aiden. The idea is clearly to use a combination of the two, switching between the ethereal entity and Jodie to achieve the best results in a conflict – Aiden can possess enemies, which Jodie can use to her advantage. A confident Cage has a firm handling on the action and spectacle, but there's still a sense that he maintains a tight grasp over each scenario, curbing the player's behaviour from improvising too overtly from the script. Yet, despite its restrictions, *Beyond: Two Souls* is fast becoming PlayStation 3's boldest title to date.







Format: PS3, Xbox 360 Publisher: Rockstar Games Developer: Rockstar North Origin: Scotland Release: 17 September

GTA V

Thug life

Rockstar isn't known for talking much, but summer is an especially a quiet month from the company. So quiet in fact, that it's decided to wait until the posturing and bluster of E3 has died down to talk more about *Grand Theft Auto V*. However, we do know that the studio has partnered with Sony to release a PlayStation 3 *Grand Theft Auto V* bundle at launch, but that news will likely come as disappointment to those anticipating a next-gen jump for the sequel. Still, its arrival at the end of the hardware life cycle makes *GTA V* a suitably epic swansong for the generation.



Format: Xbox 360, PC, PS3 Publisher: Deep Silver Developer: Volition Origin: US Release: 23 August

SAINTS ROW IV

The story of a super-powered President that just wants to have fun

Do you cure cancer or rid the third world of famine? Or, to put it in *Saints Row*'s inimitable lexicon: f* cancer or let them eat cake?** Either way, the addition of moral dilemmas is a curious but hardly absurd idea for a series that takes the spaghetti-to-the-wall approach to game design. Yet, with feet planted firmly in the polished brogues of the President of the United States, we find it a beat of moral fibre that oddly holds weight. We briefly mediate on the possible ramifications, pausing as character-actor Keith David (appearing both voice and face) stares on intently. Becoming aware of the inordinate amount of time we're taking, we buckle under the pressure and cure cancer. Cripes, this President lark is taxing stuff.

Not that it seems to have fazed the President, who after deliberating on a few more issues ('Punch a dickhead or punch a dick in the head') finds himself at ground zero of an alien invasion. The oval office transforms into the President's personal armoury and the leader of the free world is found shooting through the White House corridors busting extra-terrestrial marauders into the ether. Action quickly moves outside the White House walls, with the President manning a giant turret in the gardens before diving into a fistfight with the alien leader. So you can calm down now, everyone – it's not all morality and tough decisions – *Saints Row IV*: service resumed.



Format: PS3, Xbox 360 Publisher: Konami Developer: MercurySteam Origin: Spain Release: Q4 2013

CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOWS 2

Dead and loving it

After decades of battling Dracula, *Castlevania* fans have their first opportunity to wield the powers of the Prince of Darkness himself. Brooding in his castle for aeons, Gabriel – who became Dracula in the climax of *Lord Of Shadows* – is now planted in the present, enabling him to explore an open-world environment. But before we're given the opportunity we head back 1,000 years when Dracula is at the height of his power. Ostensibly the tutorial stage, set within Dracula's gothic cathedral, it enables players to become acquainted with the glorious fury of Gabriel's full arsenal – switching between the armour-shattering ferocity of the Chaos Claws and the health-replenishing Void Sword on the fly – but more impressive is the healthy progression of existing systems. Hewing through legions of enemies is made easier with the free-roaming camera, which, alongside a honed dodge mechanic, elevates the series' combat to an all-time technical high.

The action escalates throughout the presentation until Gabriel vanquishes a group of soldiers and moves into the castle's courtyard where a hulking Siege Titan bears down on the vampire. It's after this intense boss battle that Gabriel meets his son Alucard, before time jumps 1,000 years into the future to find a gaunt, feeble Gabriel stripped of his powers about to embark on a journey to rid himself of immortality. MercurySteam is going for broke in the concluding chapter of its *Castlevania* trilogy, offering an open world city that expands as you continue to explore. It's not a complete departure from the series' gothic environs – despite a luminous Times Square-like area, much of the metropolis is bathed in gloom, medieval architecture and tight corridors – but this is far from an also-ran genre entry. *Castlevania* is stepping out of the shadows for its final venture on 360 and PS3.

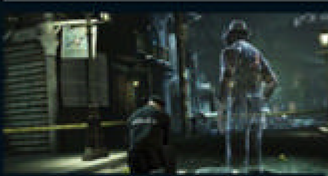
AND THE REST



Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: In-house
Origin: Canada Release Date: 22 August 2013

SPLINTER CELL: BLACKLIST

● Sam Fisher returns for his sixth and final current-gen outing in *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, a direct sequel to 2010's Conviction. *Blacklist* is pushing the series further away from the slow-paced stealth of *Chaos Theory*, making Fisher's excursions more in-line with Jason Bourne's.



Publisher: Square Enix Developer: Airtight Games
Origin: US Release Date: 2014

MURDERED: SOUL SUSPECT

● If in *Die Hard*, instead of waiting for him to finish a quip, the terrorists gunned John McClane down only to find he then returned to reclaim Nakatomi plaza as a ghost, that's the basic premise of *Murdered: Soul Sacrifice*, an intriguing point-and-click adventure.



Format: Multi Publisher: Temco Koei Developer: Team Ninja Origin: Japan Release Date: 2014

YAIBA: NINJA GAIDEN Z

● The *Ninja Gaiden* franchise has grown predictable, with Ryu's previous outing casting a large shadow over the series. Thankfully, *Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z* is a fresh take on the universe, adopting a pulpy hack-and-slash vibe.



Publisher: Square Enix Developer: In-house
Origin: Japan Release Date: 11 February 2014

LIGHTNING RETURNS: FINAL FANTASY XIII

● *Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII* makes us dare to put faith back into the Fabula Nova Crystallis mythology. Brand new mechanics, an intriguing time system and, of course, the conclusion of Lightning's character arc.



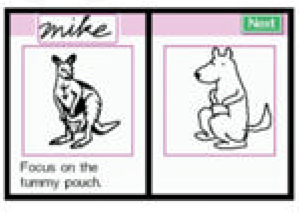
50 DEFINING GAMES OF THIS CONSOLE GENERATION

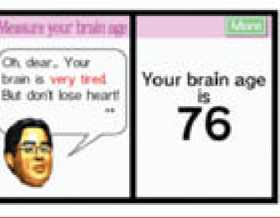
As we near the end of another console cycle, **games™** reflects on the games that defined a whole generation of experiences. This is by no means a list of the greatest games to have been released on the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, Nintendo DS and PSP, but a compendium of titles that had an undeniably momentous impact on the industry today, creatively, commercially or culturally. Without further ado, here's our 50 Defining Games Of This Generation…

50 DR. KAWASHIMA'S BRAIN TRAINING: HOW OLD IS YOUR BRAIN?

Nintendo, Nintendo DS

■ With *Brain Training*, Nintendo discovered a unit-shifting hit to rival *Tetris* in terms of broad commerciality, even if the former's elementary collection of *Mail On Sunday* timewasters lacked a definite evergreen gameplay appeal. Despite the limitations of its conceit, *Brain Training* was no less a pioneer for accessible gaming, cementing the vast consumer appeal of quick-fire gaming that smartphones and tablets would capitalise on a few years later.





49 GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

Ready At Dawn, PSP

■ The *God Of War* series was always a technical marvel. Letting players slash and carve their way through a plethora of gods in the name of revenge, against all odds, the template translated fantastically over to Sony's handheld. A showcase for the system's power, *Chains Of Olympus* was a must-play for PSP owners.





48 FIFA 09

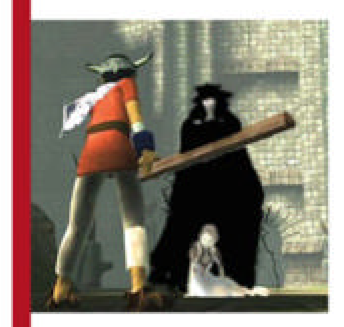
EA Canada, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

■ For seven years, *Pro Evolution Soccer* reigned supreme. Any fan of the beautiful game knew *FIFA* was played for laughs, but in 2008 the game changed. *FIFA 09* redefined on-the-pitch football, and undoubtedly presented one of the most refined and polished sports games to date. *FIFA 09* set a new benchmark, and Konami has been playing catch-up ever since.

47 ICO & SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS COLLECTION

Sony Japan, PlayStation 3

■ The industry has seen no shortage of budget re-issues of classic titles, but it wasn't until towards the end of 2011 that Sony saw the true potential of releasing ports (primarily from the previous console generation) at retail. *ICO* & *Shadow Of The Colossus* came as a cherished opportunity to relive two monumental examples of design artistry in HD, but other publishers still followed suit with various recognisable franchises. With profit to be made, it's little wonder that backwards compatibility has become a dirty phrase.





46 BAYONETTA

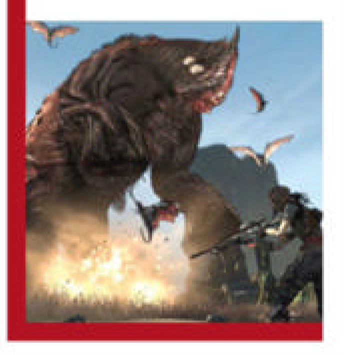
Platinum Games, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

■ *Bayonetta* is the perfectly formed cult videogame.

45 BORDERLANDS

Gearbox Software, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

■ After a decade spent developing *Half-Life* expansions and *Brothers In Arms* games, Gearbox made a massive internal shift. Ditching the bland colour palette that came to define many FPS games of the era, *Borderlands* fused familiar RPG elements with a rambunctious adventure, all wrapped in an unhinged graphical style. *Borderlands* is a loot-driven FPS done right.





44 OSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN

Nintendo, Nintendo DS

■ Never released outside of native Japan, *Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan* pitched the unlikely prospect of a functional rhythm-action title on a handheld device. And it worked. Thanks to *Gitaroo Man*, creator Keiichi Yano, the touchscreen on the Nintendo DS proved the perfect facilitator for J-rock madness to herald the genre's major transition.

43 FORZA 3

Turn 10 Studios, Xbox 360

■ *Forza* has always been seen as Microsoft's answer to *Gran Turismo*, but it was the 2009 effort that finally cemented it as worthy competition. Turn 10's pursuit of photorealism was finally becoming a reality thanks to the power of the Xbox 360, and *Forza 3* quickly became the go-to racing simulation experience.



42 ROCK BAND

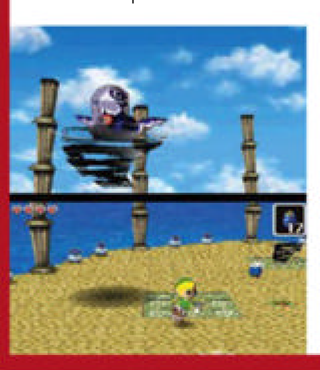
Harmonix, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

■ *Guitar Hero* had already set the world's stage alight with its one-man show, but *Rock Band* turned the conceit of peripheral-fuelled rhythm-action games up to 11 adding the full band to the roster. An oddly authentic experience regardless of whether you're strumming, drumming or humming, it was clear that *Rock Band* was a cultural event in its own right. The only people that didn't like it were your neighbours at 3am.

41 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

Nintendo, Nintendo DS

■ *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker* may have been one of the most divisive entries to the series, but Nintendo saw fit to continue Link's adventures over the Great Sea with *Phantom Hourglass*. Boasting an innovative control scheme, it fused wonderful puzzles with intuitive touch-screen combat, and is still one of the best examples of the handheld's capabilities.



40 DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

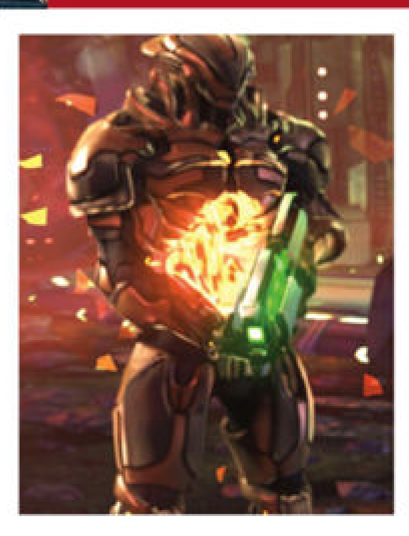
3D Realms/Gearbox Software, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

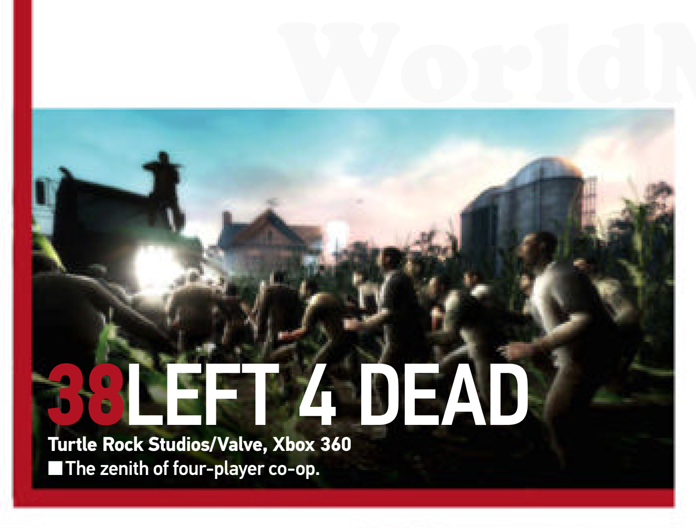
■ A case of obscene anticipation swelling over fourteen long years, *Duke* only gets on this list for the unlikely escape from development hell. But we're quick to forget what an unprecedented event (and it was an *event*) Duke's return actually was. He was back, thawed as a hero out of time. But among the tasteless sexism and bravado as bloated as his upper arms, this was a jumbo-sized disaster of a release that soured us on the series, fuelled by noisy publicity.

39 XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN

Firaxis Gamess, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

■ One of the biggest casualties of any console cycle is the strategy game, but Firaxis' reimagining of Amiga classic *UFO: Enemy Unknown* did everything right. Streamlining the controls for the gamepad while still retaining depth, and the inclusion of squad micro-management that is usually absent from console releases, *XCOM* proves they can work away from a PC.





38 LEFT 4 DEAD

Turtle Rock Studios/Valve, Xbox 360

■ The zenith of four-player co-op.

37 THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU

Square Enix, Nintendo DS

■ From the mind behind the *Kingdom Hearts* franchise, Square Enix shocked RPG fans with this unique and intricately detailed supernatural adventure. With the player dropped into the fashion circles of Tokyo, it smartly utilised the stable of DS features to forge an altogether different combat system with a remarkable artistic style.





36 MARIO KART DS

Nintendo, Nintendo DS

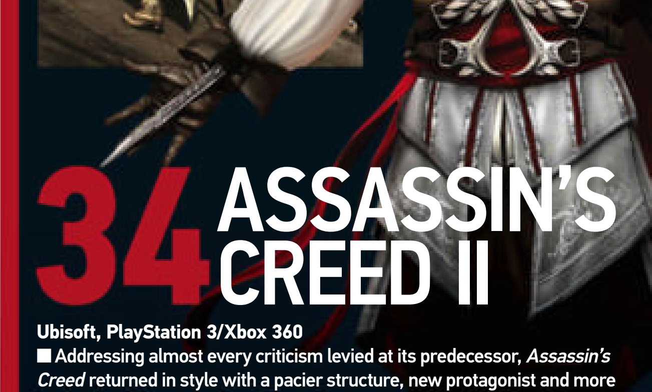
■ The fifth instalment into the hugely popular *Mario Kart* franchise, and long considered to be one of the best, *Mario Kart DS* redefined the arcade racer for a brand new audience. The first to utilise online play, the DS iteration surpassed the standards of its predecessors with refined mechanics and intuitive multiplayer.



35 NO MORE HEROES

Grasshopper Manufacture, Wii

■ It's impossible to sum up Suda51 in a word. Brilliant. Insane. Innovative. All of the above and much more apply. But it was the tenacious confluence of surreal design and motion control that offered the truest catalyst for the auteur's unbridled imagination. *No More Heroes* wasn't just a great game: it was a great Wii game. Making smart choices with the much-maligned waggle-wand and matching it with an exceptional wit.



34 ASSASSIN'S CREED II

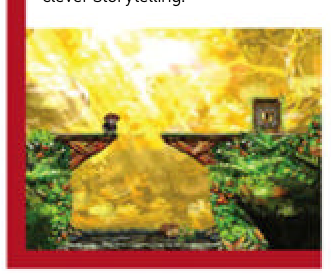
Ubisoft, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

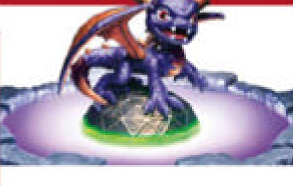
■ Addressing almost every criticism levied at its predecessor, *Assassin's Creed* returned in style with a pacier structure, new protagonist and more inviting backdrop to explore. The refinements reinforced its franchise muscle and it became an annual juggernaut to rival even *Call Of Duty*.

33 BRAID

Number None, Xbox 360

■ Jonathan Blow's *Braid* was an early success for downloadable titles. It showed that there was profit to be made for indie studios in the market, and that gamers were hungry for new experiences. While short in length, *Braid* was a beautiful new kind of adventure that fused emergent gameplay and clever storytelling.





32 SKYLANDERS: SPYRO'S ADVENTURE

Toys For Bob, PlayStation 3/ Xbox 360/Wii

■ Spyro the Dragon may look like he'd be more comfortable toasting marshmallows than immolating his foes, but in *Skylanders* the amiable mascot became a devastating killer. With the title's compulsive combination of accessible, RPG-lite gameplay and real-world action figures – using NFC to become avatars within the game – the brand has cannibalised the retail space. This is the future.

31 JOURNEY

thatgamecompany, PlayStation 3

■ The vast desert expanse of *Journey* is a canvas of intrigue that unfurls differently for each player, possessing the strange ability to manipulate our emotions based on the strength, variety and atmosphere of its extraordinary environmental design.

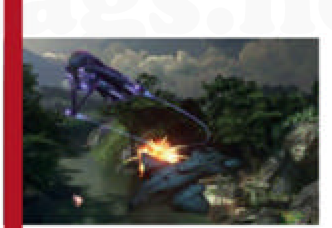




30 STREET FIGHTER IV

Capcom, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

■ The rebirth of the fighting genre.



28 HALO 3

Bungie, Xbox 360

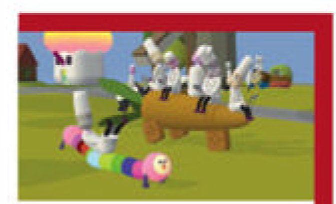
■ If *Halo 2* showed the promise of Xbox Live, then its sequel demonstrated the majesty of online play. *Halo 3* was an early victory for Microsoft, highlighting how hungry gamers were to jump into multiplayer with Spartans around the world. *Halo 3* set the precedent for online multiplayer modes and functionality.



25 THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Bethesda Softworks, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

■ Just as the next generation was finding its feet, *Oblivion* launched with an immersive fantasy universe unlike any other. Expanding on the themes presented by *Morrowind*; Cyrodiil's gorgeous forests and living and breathing cities were a testament to the power of the new systems. *Oblivion* was the first game that made us dream big about the possibilities of thriving open worlds.



27 NOBY NOBY BOY

Namco Bandai, PlayStation 3

■ One of the PSN's sparkling oddities, *Katamari Damacy* creator Keita Takahashi's eccentric sandbox nurtured an adoring community of strangers. The joint efforts of millions of users, each submitting points online after elongating their personal worm-like quadrupedal, contributed to the galactic proportions of GIRL as she stretches through our Solar System. There's nothing else out there quite like it.

29 THE ORANGE BOX

Valve, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

■ The box of infinite entertainment, *The Orange Box* was Valve's love letter to gaming. The five games inside are all essential, with the emergence of *Portal* signifying a revival of the puzzle genre with its immensely clever gravity shifting mechanics.

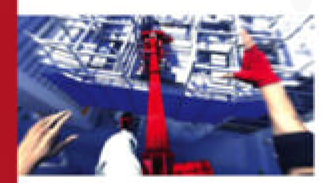


26 PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE CURIOUS VILLAGE

Level-5, Nintendo DS

■ Puzzle games undoubtedly rule the roost on the DS. Level-5 decided to approach the genre with a different tack, injecting an inimitable sense of character and an engrossing story that chained together the various mind-tickling brainteasers across the game. The character Professor Layton added value to the puzzles, and puzzle games consequently became synonymous with *Layton*.





24 MIRROR'S EDGE

DICE, PlayStation 3/ Xbox 360

■ Gamers were desperate for fresh ideas to be injected into the generation, and DICE answered with *Mirror's Edge*, a brand new IP with a bold vision. Abandoning the shooting antics of *Battlefield*, DICE created a fluid first-person action game that relied on parkour to deliver thrills, and nothing has come close to replicating the experience.





21 GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

Rockstar North, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

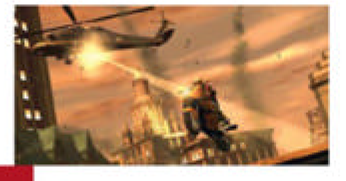
■ *Grand Theft Auto* has traditionally tackled difficult subjects, but *GTA IV* took it one step further with Niko Bellic's rags-to-rags story. Perhaps the most focussed narrative to grace an open-world game, it came across a little dry for certain fans, but its portrayal of Liberty City as a New York analogue is absurdly generous in detail.



23 SUPER MARIO GALAXY

Nintendo, Nintendo Wii

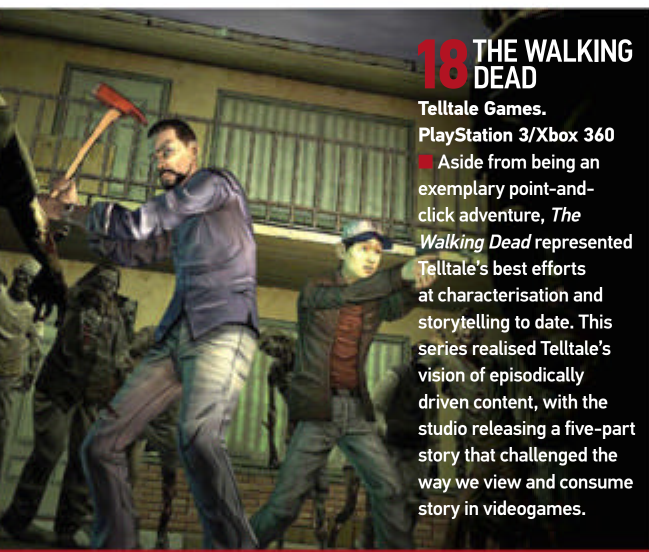
■ While no one was under any illusion that *Super Mario Galaxy* would reinvent the platformer, it's a testament to the matchless originality of Nintendo that it came so close. And what an audacious gamble *Galaxy* was: launching its enduring mascot into a bold new world where every level dared to rewrite the rulebook. It proved that when it came to ingenuity, execution and just plain fun, *Mario* still reigns supreme.



20 GRAND THEFT AUTO: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY

Rockstar North, Playstation 3/ Xbox 360

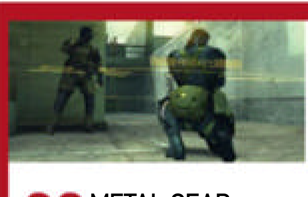
■ Comprised of *The Lost And The Damned* and *The Ballad Of Gay Tony*, the *Episodes From Liberty City* showcased a world beyond what we have come to expect from DLC. The expansions opened up the world of Liberty City and injected the humour back into the playground that was sometimes absent from *GTA IV*.



18 THE WALKING DEAD

Telltale Games. PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

■ Aside from being an exemplary point-and-click adventure, *The Walking Dead* represented Telltale's best efforts at characterisation and storytelling to date. This series realised Telltale's vision of episodically driven content, with the studio releasing a five-part story that challenged the way we view and consume story in videogames.



22 METAL GEAR SOLID: PEACE WALKER

Kojima Productions, PSP

■ The PSP was always promised it could bring the power of the PlayStation 2 to gamers' hands, and nothing came as close to realising this vision as Hideo Kojima's *Peace Walker*. Pushing the power of the hardware, while still delivering an incredibly rich and vibrant entry into the *Metal Gear* franchise, *Peace Walker* is a victory for storytelling on handheld consoles.



19 PORTAL 2

Valve, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

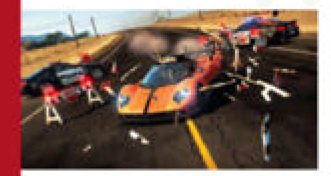
■ Making two-player co-op meaningful.



17 DARK SOULS

From Software, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

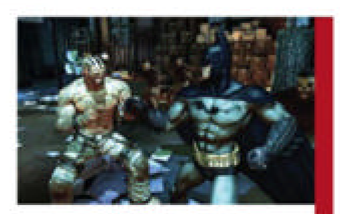
■ Nothing quite compares to the abasement felt when approaching the fog gates of Smough and Ornstein for the umpteenth time. But players returned, again and again, spurred by the challenge and the reward of unmatched gratification. *Dark Souls* left players caterwauling in masochistic bliss, demonstrating a desire for difficulty. And the industry was listening.



16 NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT

Criterion Games, PlayStation 3/ Xbox 360

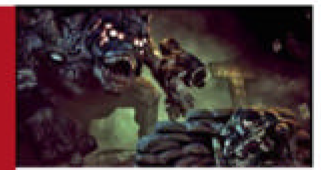
■ The idea of community had always eluded the racing genre up until *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit* came along. Autolog was an elegant solution that changed the face of online racing overnight. A social network fuelled by the competitive mentality of its audience; few could resist the allure of a fresh challenge notification. Criterion's work would later inform EA's entire portfolio.



15 BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM/CITY

Rocksteady Studios, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

■ The sophomore effort from unknown British developer Rocksteady, *Batman: Arkham Asylum* was a bolt from the blue, handling the esteemed licence with a due reverence that shucked industry expectations. While other developers saw a licenced property as a box to be constrained by, Rocksteady embraced both its limitations and indulged in its strengths. *Arkham City* shares a place on this list for taking those admirable philosophies even further.



14 GEARS OF WAR

Epic Games, Xbox 360

■ Emergence Day 2006 will forever be the day that the third-person shooter was revolutionised. Beneath the bulking behemoth protagonists and the array of grizzly weaponry, an intuitive cover system could be found. It allowed for seamless navigation of environments in firefights and has been iterated on ever since.



13 MINECRAFT

Mojang/ 4J Studios, Xbox 360

■ *Minecraft* was a phenomenon long before it arrived on the Xbox 360. Social media played a significant role in popularising the title, but the impact of Notch's project – helped by its port onto Microsoft's system, which added a tutorial to make the complicated systems more accessible – has ingrained itself deeply so deeply into the cultural zeitgeist. It's easy to believe that within this pixel-sprinkled realm anything really is possible.

12 METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

Kojima Productions, PlayStation 3

■ At a time when videogames thought they were exempt from the global recession that was beginning to unfold, *Guns Of The Patriots* arrived with all of the bombast of the biggest summer Hollywood flick. Its direction, vision and execution is still unrivalled in the industry, with Kojima once again demonstrating his innate ability to surpass consumer expectation.





11 LA NOIRE

Team Bondi, PlayStation 3/ Xbox 360

■ *LA Noire* combined pioneering facial animation tech with rich period detail and a compelling story.



10 WII SPORTS

Nintendo, Nintendo Wii

■ If there's one title on this list that has had the biggest, most tangible impact on today's industry then it's *Wii Sports*. Packaged at launch with the Nintendo Wii, it was a vehicle for showcasing the motion control revolution, demonstrating the simplicity of the conceit and, above all else, how anyone could give it a waggle. It cemented itself as all-encompassing lifestyle accessory, flooding mainstream media as casual games quickly became a *thing*. A thing that, soon enough, galvanised each platform holder to scramble for its own slice of the pie, as interest shifted towards this newfound and untapped market.

But this was more than a cynical cash-grab, and *Wii Sports* perfectly pitched the formula for a successful casual title, infusing ankle-deep mechanics with familiar concepts, as activities such as tennis didn't require much suspension of disbelief. If *Super Mario 64* changed games for gamers, then *Wii Sports* changed gamers with games. It may have been a fad, but nothing has quite been the same since *Wii Sports* invaded living rooms in 2006. And it's hard to imagine the industry enduring another instance of such radical transformation again.



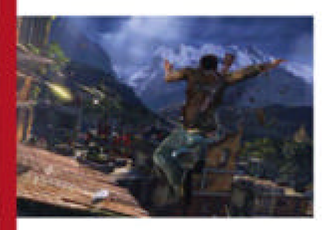
9 UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES

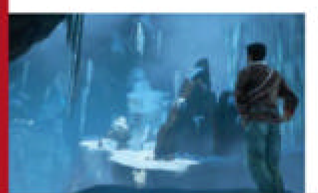
Naughty Dog, PlayStation 3

■ *Uncharted 2* illustrated just how important structure and pacing is in a modern action game. In the space of an hour, you go from the iconic train setpiece that keeps finding new, thrilling threats to throw at you, to exploring a peaceful Tibetan village where you shake hands with the residents using the triangle button. Both ideas are just as important to the flow of the experience, and Naughty Dog showed that it understood that paradigm better than anyone.

If the first *Uncharted* demonstrated how cinematic storytelling could work on modern hardware without becoming a parody of itself, the second gave us a tale that rivals a quality summer blockbuster in terms of scriptwriting and acting.

The small details in facial animations ensured that the cutscenes felt like a rich component of *Uncharted 2*'s overall arc, and not simply an obstacle keeping you from the rest of the game that you're keen to skip. In an industry that is rather anti-cutscene in the way it critiques modern storytelling in videogames, Naughty Dog reminded us why they were there in the first place. *Uncharted 2* was the very peak of the action game experience during this generation, something that was fresh and essential in the way it interpreted existing ideas.







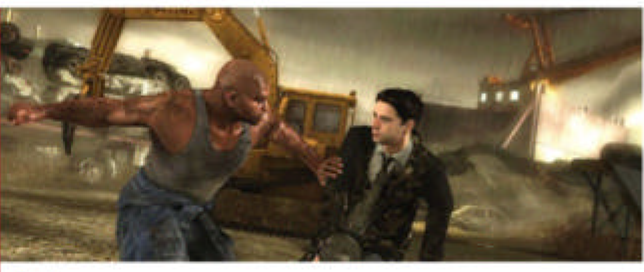
8 RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Rockstar, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

This generation has seen a flurry of activity from Rockstar Games, though perhaps its greatest success has been *Red Dead Redemption*. A quality Western is hard to come by, in any form of media, but Rockstar San Diego managed to deliver perhaps the defining reflection of the American Frontier for the 21st Century, thus far at any rate. From its world to its iconic characters, *Red Dead Redemption* felt like it got everything right.

Against all odds, Rockstar took the established *Grand Theft Auto* template and moved it successfully into the old west, with the developer clearly learning from the few mistakes made with *GTA IV*. Your purpose clearer, the supporting cast engaging and the world so richly detailed that hours would be spent riding the plains of the Old West with no purpose other than the thrill of exploration driving you.

Not only was it an all-round champion of great game design, *Red Dead Redemption* also had moments of beauty unlike any other. Crossing into Nuevo Paraiso for the first time, sun setting behind the mountains, as José González's *Far Away* sweeps through the barren world – those few minutes mark a defining moment in the history of videogames.



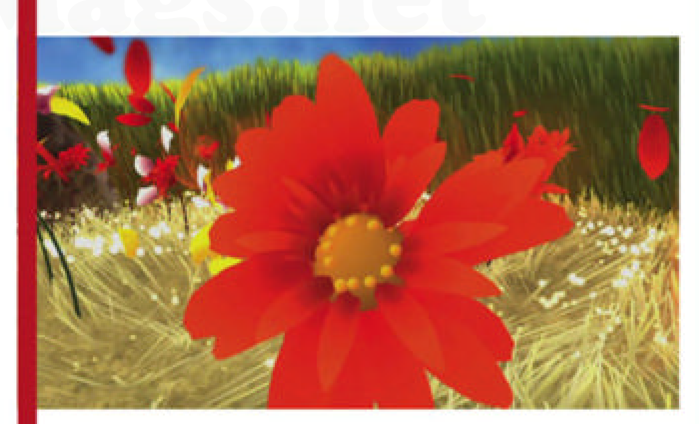
7 HEAVY RAIN

Quantic Dream, PlayStation 3

As great as this generation has been, it has seen 'the sequel' dominate much of the discussion. New IP became a rarity as the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 moved into the second half of their eight-year tenure, with but a few studios pushing the envelope on interactive experiences. Quantic Dream is one of those studios, and its debut PS3 title *Heavy Rain* was an exciting attempt to evolve the way we perceive storytelling in modern games.

By videogame standards, *Heavy Rain* was a revelation. The plot was of course a patchwork of film noir and thriller cliché, but the way David Cage brought it together was unprecedented. Looking at the wider industry, what passes for mature storytelling usually boils down to war shooters with a twist, but *Heavy Rain* was utterly absorbing, and as the multiple narratives begin to thread together, its hard to imagine a player not wrapped up in the hunt for the Origami serial killer.

Heavy Rain's gameplay split opinion, there's no question about it, with some contesting it was an interactive film to a fault – though we see it as the biggest platform and advocator to the return of the point-and-click adventure game movement. As decisive as it might be, *Heavy Rain* is still one of the most interesting interactive experiences to arrive this generation.



6 FLOWER

thatgamecompany, PlayStation 3

Reigniting the ever-tedious videogame as art debate, *Flower* spearheaded the indie movement on consoles, highlighting exactly why we've come to celebrate the PlayStation Network. As a platform it offers developers an opportunity to craft alternative experiences, many of which – like *Flower* – simply defy categorisation in traditional genres. *Flower* isn't simply a game, but an experience that draws players into its vividly conceptualised universe, delivering a stirring ballet of audio/visual elements that you don't so much play as sit back and absorb. It's a transient, bold and powerful performance and it's hard to imagine it existing without an equally bold platform to shine on.

5 MASS EFFECT 2



Rockstar, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

BioWare may have cut its teeth on fantasy RPG adventures such as *Baldur's Gate* and *Neverwinter Nights*, though the studio is perhaps most fondly remembered for *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic*. Establishing a galaxy far, far away as a place to explore the morality of the Old Republic, many of the themes and morality systems were first implemented in *KOTOR* before BioWare perfected them in its own IP, *Mass Effect*.

Mass Effect 2 was something else entirely however, improving on its predecessor in almost every facet of its design, it is undoubtedly one of this generation's defining RPGs. The studio may have placed more emphasis on the action and third-person shooter elements than ever before, but in doing so it seamlessly integrated combat with the ingenious morality and role-playing elements that resonated so well with gamers.

Mass Effect 2 raised the stakes for Commander Shepard and the crew of the SSV Normandy, as players navigated the Milky Way galaxy building loyalty with a varied ground of battle-hardened misfits before taking on a suicide mission to save everything you'd sunk so many hours into preserving. The outcome and survival of the characters was never assured throughout the narrative, and it created more than its share of talking points.



4 LITTLEBIGPLANET

Media Molecule, PlayStation 3

It was a world of your own making. A whimsical diorama built on sponges and cardboard, seemingly kept together by sticky-back-plastic and a few tears of tape. But what really held it together was your imagination. And what elevated *LittleBigPlanet* from indie curio to triple-A blockbuster was the collaborative imagination of a whole universe of worlds.

'Play. Create. Share' became ingrained into a new generation of gamers dipping their toes into the vast waters of a zealous community of creators. Media Molecule's 20-or-so levels of retro platforming were just the tip of a very big iceberg and barely scratched the surface of what was possible with the developer's provided tools. Levels inspired by other notable games became the norm, but outside these would-be Miyamotos was a constellation of uncharted lands rich in anarchic humour, wild creativity and raw ingenuity that could only have been conceived by determined amateurs outside of the industry.

What started out as a little game became very big in a few short months and the extraordinary efforts of one little knitted hero and millions of dedicated players worldwide revealed a common yearning among gamers. They wanted to collaborate, to create, commentate and proudly exhibit their efforts. In some way, it was the return of the bedroom coder.



3 BIOSHOCK

Irrational Games, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

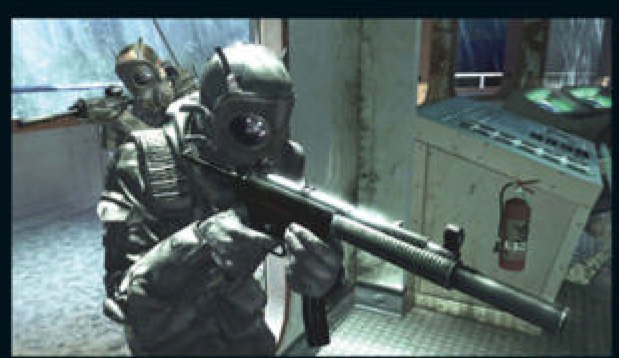
The impact of Irrational Games' *BioShock* is still felt to this day. Six years on, and the world beneath the waves is still an inspiration to any aspiring would-be game makers. The concept of *BioShock* wasn't particularly new, itself a spiritual successor to *System Shock 2*, but the way Ken Levine and his team at Irrational executed the game mechanics and narrative set *BioShock* apart from the mass of generic first-person shooters in development at the time. Set in Rapture, an underwater city built on the pillars of objectivism and crushed under the weight of power and addiction, it was an awe-inspiring location to explore – with each corridor and room seemingly hiding yet another piece of Irrational's grand puzzle.

We arrived when the city was buckling under the weight of the Atlantic Ocean. An unforgettable plane crash led to a mysterious lighthouse and a bathysphere ride of a lifetime. Once on dry land, Rapture revealed a winding narrative that not only managed to remain captivating from start to finish – but it made players question agency throughout all gaming experiences.

When it comes to rich, compelling narratives and unbeatable game design, it's hard to question *BioShock*'s dominance.







2 CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

Infinity Ward, PlayStation 3/Xbox 360

No one had more reason to be angry with *Call Of Duty* than Valve. After years reigning supreme with *Counter-Strike* as the pinnacle of online first-person shooter, it was usurped by inarguably the most progressive, addictive and energetic shooter to hit the market since Bungie's *Halo*. It was a simple notion, implementing experience points, unlocks, levelling-up and the like, cribbed mercilessly from the role-playing genre. It was in no uncertain terms a revolution: driving personality and customisation right into the heart of the battlefield. Suddenly your decisions pre-match could lead to consequences as fatal as a poorly-timed flashbang grenade; selecting the wrong perk or secondary weapon could have devastating ramifications both in the immediate and the larger match.

It also, for better or worse, came to define what was affectionately labelled the 'Xbox Live' generation. This was a group of individuals that savoured their own voice, with speakers across the world throbbing with the sound of vociferous goading alongside the deafening cacophony of machine gun fire.

Despite the culture it inspired, *Modern Warfare* should be lauded for making online multiplayer meaningful, with its reward system that honoured genuine skill with achievements and incentive. The fact that it came packaged with one of the most bold, tactile and punchy campaigns that the genre has ever produced ultimately makes its innovations all the more special. And they say war never changes…



The revolutionary Vault-Assisted Targeting System created a unique tactical aspect that set it apart from other FPS games.

Wandering through this epic scenery presented many initial dangers, but after scouring the wastelands, and powering up your character, the sense of authority was immense.

1 FALLOUT 3

THE FIRST tentative steps into the blinding sunlight of *Fallout 3*'s irradiated dystopia are simply unforgettable. Looking out over the endless expanse of the Wasteland and realising the magnitude of the adventure that awaits was an equally daunting prospect for both Vault 101's fugitive and the player.

The husk of DC is rich in history and secrets, with pockets of isolated communities chained together to form an immersive backdrop as vast and compelling as anything we've had the pleasure of playing over the past console generation.

Fallout 3 showcased the depth and tangible nature that open worlds can offer, with a nebulous approach to its structure that enables players to absorb the narrative at their own pace; time invested in exploring the wilderness peeled back more layers of intrigue, its spoils unknown but plenteous. Whether scavenging through the ruins of a village or infiltrating a clandestine mutant hideout, there is always a fascinating sub-plot to tackle, a secret to unfurl, or some anarchic thrill to be had.

It may be a grim vision of the apocalypse but *Fallout 3* still knew how to have fun. A punchy arsenal and gratuitous kill-cam was matched with the precision V.A.T.S. system – a welcome stroke of absurdist design, making enemy encounters over-the-top without jarring the overall tone.

Admittedly this all amounts to an incredible, uninhibited ambition, and as such it has its problems, with a litany of frustrating bugs that plagued the title on launch. But it's easy to ignore such minor quibbles when the wasteland is brimming with personality, enabling players to trawl its ravaged planes and determine exactly the type of survivor they wanted to be. There's no faulting the elegance of a dialogue system that seemed to offer endless permutations and opportunities – that often circled a murky moral grey area, avoiding two-sided binary routes – to define the nature of your journey.

Individuality was the keystone of Bethesda's masterpiece, and the concourse of several involving, intricate gameplay systems matched with the way it eschews traditional conventions created a wasteland that was perfect for wasting time in.

FALLOUT 3 DIRECTOR TODD HOWARD RESPONDS

We were big fans of the early games, and when the chance came up to create a new one, we were overjoyed. It's one thing to admire *Fallout* from afar, and another to love it as a developer. It's absolutely one of the best gaming worlds you can create in, it has all the pieces that make for interesting choices and exploration. It has a very special tone. After spending so many years with it, we still feel lucky that we got a chance to add a chapter, and incredibly thankful that so many people enjoyed it.

Generation End

Free or paid-for online services, the allure of platform exclusives and the fight over motion controls. Discover whether Microsoft, Nintendo or Sony won the last generation of consoles

Global Software Sales

How much money each of the top five exclusives made on each console

PSP
1. Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories 7.49
2. Monster Hunter Freedom Unite 5.36
3. Monster Hunter Freedom 3 .... 4.86
4. Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories 4.77
5. Daxter 4.08

XBOX 360
1. Kinect Adventures! 20.08
2. Halo 3 .... 11.77
3. Halo: Reach 9.43
4. Halo 4 .... 8.28
5. Gears of War 2 .... 6.62

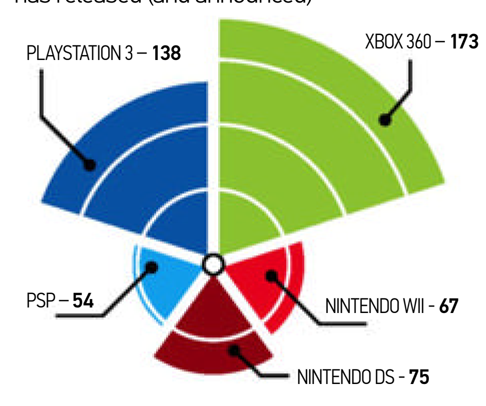
NINTENDO WII
1. Wii Sports 81.29
2. Mario Kart Wii 33.75
3. Wii Sports Resort 31.67
4. Wii Play 28.73
5. New Super Mario Bros. Wii 26.92

PLAYSTATION 3
1. Gran Turismo 5 .... 10.41
2. Uncharted 2: Among Thieves 6.18
3. Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception 5.89
4. Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots 5.77
5. LittleBigPlanet 5.19

NINTENDO DS
1. New Super Mario Bros. 29.18
2. Nintendogs DS 24.52
3. Mario Kart DS 22.53
4. Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day 20.03
5. Pokémon Diamond / Pearl Version 8.06

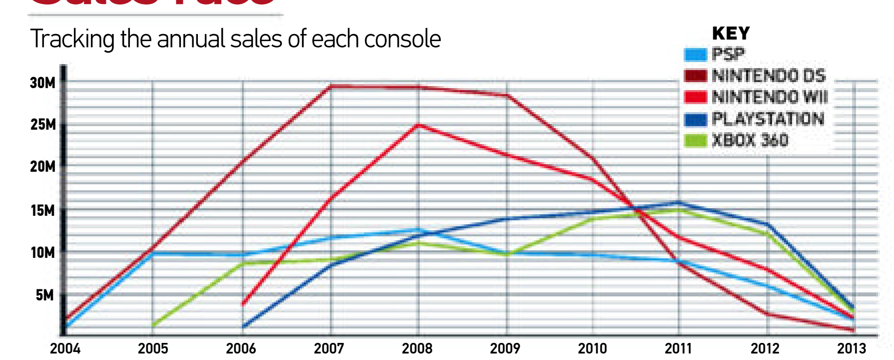
The Exclusives

The number of exclusives each platform has released (and announced)



Sales race

Tracking the annual sales of each console



Console bucks

How many units each console sold and region popularity

KEY
PSP
NINTENDO DS
NINTENDO WII
PLAYSTATION
XBOX 360

40,486,664
3 24,510,998
41,035,261
52,558,488
19,717,938

24,164,625
3 30,894,590
33,177,940
51,619,528
23,363,351

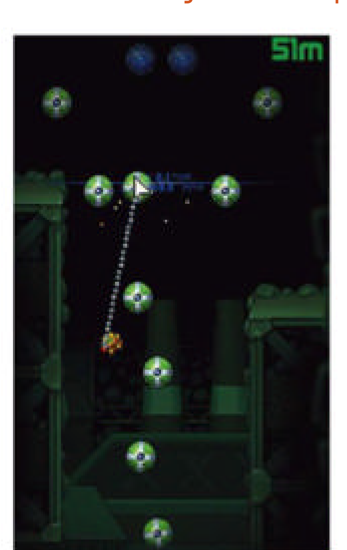
11,107,856
12,734,426
12,669,517
16,269,372
16,251,752

1,641,626
9,308,479
12,721,093
32,981,994
19,756,243

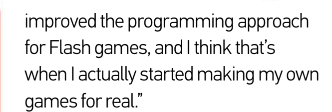
TOTAL
79,089,284
153,429,382
99,603,811
77,448,493
77,400,771

THE MOBILE PIONEERS

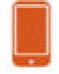
The upswell in dominance of mobile devices as a gaming platform has galvanised the creative talents of previously undiscovered developers. But how has mainstream success changed their lives? And what advice do they have for up-and-coming indies? **games™** speaks with a few talented individuals…



ADAM SALTSMAN



// STUDIO: Semi Secret Software **// KEY RELEASE**: Canabalt



What was your background before entering game development?

"Until 2006 or thereabouts I worked at a kind of nine to five software company, after which I started freelancing for the game industry in a pretty peripheral way. I made a lot of skyscrapers for *Flight Simulator X*, did some pixel art for Nokia and Sidekick mobile phone games, some work-for-hire Flash development, coded a satellite radio server and client. You know, the usual. Around that same time ActionScript 3.0 was finally released, which massively improved the programming approach for Flash games, and I think that's when I actually started making my own games for real."

At what point in time would you say you became a successful developer?

"Fall, 2008. I think most people think that *Canabalt* – which came out in Fall 2009 – was the turning point for me, and *Canabalt* was awesome, but I was independently supporting my own game making for over a year before that, with my work-for-hire efforts on Flash games and even Silverlight games and game engines. The other huge thing that happened in Fall 2008 was I helped ship an iPhone game called *Wurdle* that to date is just as big a financial success as *Canabalt*. I also made a little Flash game called *Gravity Hook* around that same

"That all these things came together in basically a twelve-month period still kind of boggles my mind, and actually messed me up kind of bad for a couple of years"



time frame that didn't make any money but got some positive attention, which was a first for a game I (partly) made up on my own. But *Wurdle* and *Canabalt* were huge surprises and luck played a large role in those successes. That all these things came together in basically a twelve-month period still kind of boggles my mind, and actually messed me up kind of bad for a couple of years."

How has the success of your game(s) changed your life?
"It's provided so much stress and so much joy. It's hard to imagine a life where I don't get to do this full-time, even though sometimes I fantasise about having a desk job or getting a taco truck or something, just to be able to unburden some of the responsibility and paperwork… but those moments are usually pretty brief. Usually. "

What is the secret to creating a successful iOS/Android game?
"If I knew that my butler would be typing this email. All I can say is this: think about how people use their mobile devices, and make something that obviously provides some value to them, even if that value is just happiness or pleasure for a little while."





JORDAN COOMBS

// STUDIO: War Balloon Games **// KEY RELEASE**: Star Command



What was your background before entering game development?
"None. Our developer, Steve Tranby, had made some small games for Android and iOS, but as a whole my brother and I had no real background making games. [*Star Command*] was our first game. Hopefully we faked it pretty well."

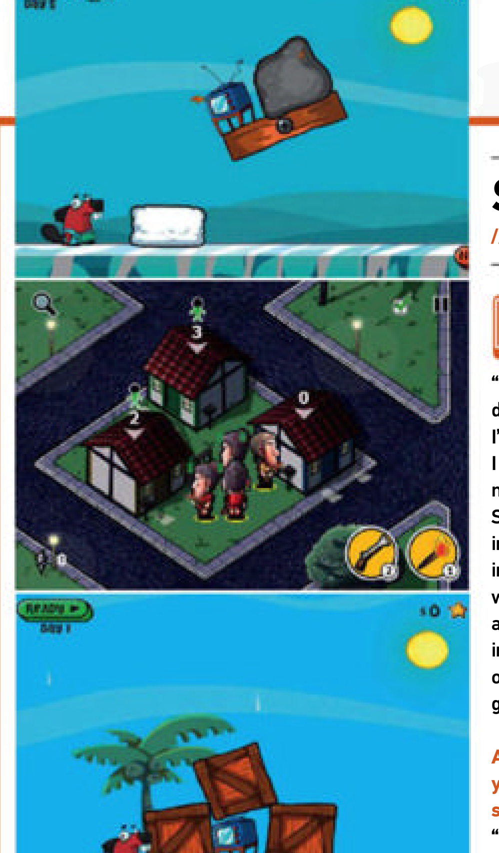
At what point in time would you say you became a successful developer?
"Our second Kickstarter really told us 'This is for real'. Our first Kickstarter was great, and we aren't complaining, but the second one showed us that our little idea had some real legs and a following. Being featured on the iTunes store didn't hurt either."

What motivated you to start developing videogames?
"We have always wanted to make games. Through the last decade it felt like you had to go work at one of the larger game companies (EA, Blizzard, Activision, etc) to get your start. However, once Steam, iOS and other digital distribution methods became popular, it became clear that this was going to be a boon for indie developers. We always wanted to do it – digital delivery made it possible."

In terms of development advantages and challenges, what does iOS/Android offer over other platforms?
"iOS/Android offer the world – literally. The devices are all over the world and between the two of them, just about everyone with a phone is covered. That's a market of a billion. That's insane. If just 1 per cent of users purchased our game our kid's grandkids probably wouldn't have to work ever again. To us that's a staggering thought. It's really just such a great environment for indie developers to break into. It's very difficult for the larger companies to just *own* the space like they did in the Nineties with shelf space at Best Buy and other retailers."

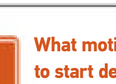
What is the secret to creating a successful iOS/Android game?
"iOS/Android games are different in that the learning curve has to be quick. It's not that players are less refined or knowledgeable – it's just that the environment demands a quick 'Okay, I get this' type of reaction. Really you aren't competing so much with other games as you are with the platform itself – people that use iPhones are used to one of the best interfaces ever designed. They want things easy, and quick. And if your game doesn't get there they can just as quickly find a new one, download it and move on. Not only that, but they have their social networks and basically their entire digital lives right there – two button pushes away. So you have to compete with that as much as other games. If you are successful – well, just look at *Angry Birds*. Life is good."

"Our first Kickstarter was great, and we aren't complaining, but the second one showed us that our little idea had some real legs and a following"



SAULO CAMAROTTI

// **STUDIO:** Behold Studios // **KEY RELEASE**: Knights Of Pen & Paper



What motivated you to start developing videogames?
"I've always had tons of game design ideas and every time I'd play a game, even when I was a child, I'd draw cool modifications of the game. So, I was always interested in modifying, creating and imagining games. I started with Game Maker, RPG Maker and 3D Game Studio. But living in Brazil, I never thought that one day I would become a game developer entrepreneur."

At what point in time would you say you became a successful developer?
"I think when we started developing *Knights of Pen & Paper*, we all thought that this is what we were meant to do. We've develop some casual games, such as *Save My Telly* and *Super Cuts*, but our hearts were really pumping with excitement after we started this old style RPG."

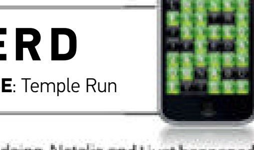
What is the secret to creating a successful iOS/ Android game?
"Create games with passion. I know a lot of companies that create games to a slice of the market, thinking on how can they earn more money. But if you create a game from your heart, thinking that you also will enjoy it and you will have your game in your own mobile phone, I'm certain that other players will love your game as well."

How has the success of your game(s) changed your life?
"One year ago, we were a group of five friends in a coffee shop, using its Wi-Fi and air conditioning. But today, we have our own studio, and now we don't need to be worried about the bills nor the food expenses."

"I think when we started developing Knights Of Pen & Paper, we all thought that this is what we were meant to do"

KEITH SHEPHERD

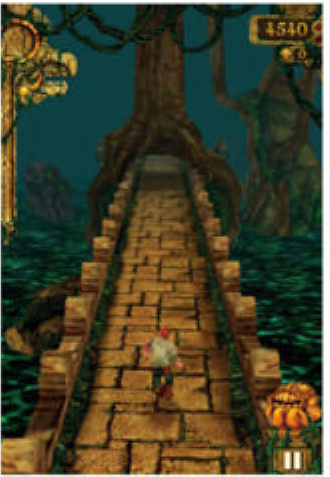
// **STUDIO:** Imangi Studios // **KEY RELEASE**: Temple Run





What was your background before entering game development?
"Natalia and I were both working as software engineers in the Healthcare industry prior to founding Imangi Studios. Mostly developing web-based back-end software applications used by hospital administrators to streamline their workflows. We both had a deep knowledge of software development and programming, but we had never worked in the game industry professionally."

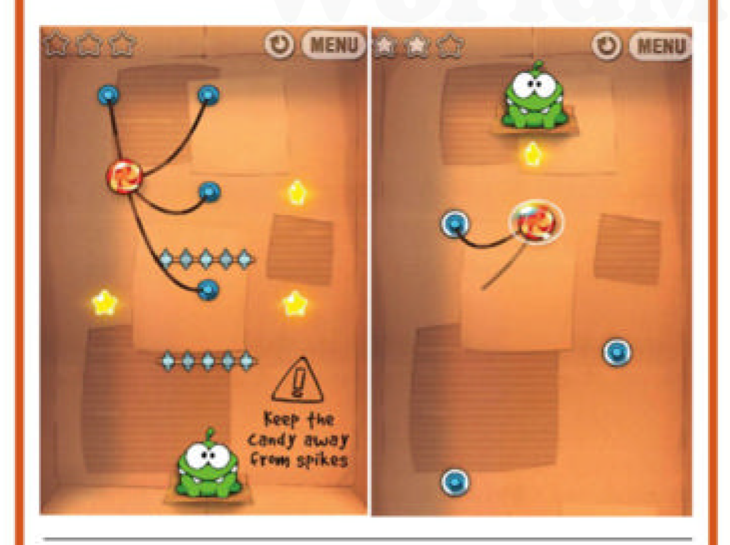
What motivated you to start developing videogames?
"I grew up playing videogames as a kid and that was the reason I got into programming – I wanted to learn how to make games. In college, I studied Computer Science and did a lot of researching in 3D graphics. I always wanted to make games professionally, but I got side-tracked after graduation during the dotcom boom and got into enterprise web application development. Founding Imangi Studios was a chance to get back to what I always dreamed of doing. Natalia and I just happened to be in the right place at the right time with the launch of the App Store. We had always dreamed of starting a company of some sort and Natalia and I made a deal that she would keep her full-time job to support me as I explored what that next step might be. About a month after I quit my full-time job, Apple announced the App Store. We both thought that this was going to be a huge opportunity and we set out to create our first app. We had about a month until the store opened so we needed to design something quick and simple that we could have ready for the opening. Naturally our ideas gravitated towards simple little games since we both shared an interest in gaming. That was the genesis of *Imangi*, a simple little word puzzle that we launched on the very first day the App Store opened."





At what point in time would you say you became a successful developer?
"Even though our first game *Imangi* didn't make much money, we felt very successful. We created something from scratch, launched with the App Store, and were making a little bit of money off of it. We made $5000 that first month and did some naive math and thought to ourselves, if we make a simple game a month and earn $5000 on each, that's a real salary! We had a taste of success and wanted more, that was what motivated us to drop everything else we were doing and focus completely on Imangi Studios and making games for a living. It wasn't until our fourth game, *Harbor Master*, that we had a taste of financial success, though. *Harbor Master* launched in the summer of 2009 and had both critical and commercial success. That is the game that really put our studio on the map and let us grow."

"We made $5000 that first month and did some naive math and thought if we make a simple game a month and earn $5000 on each, that's a real salary!"



EFIM VOINOV

// **STUDIO:** ZeptoLab // **KEY RELEASE**: Cut The Rope



What was your background before entering game development?
"Developing games was my hobby since early childhood, actually I created my first game when I was eight or nine, so I hardly remember my background before."

At what point in time would you say you became a successful developer?
"I think that was in the latest grades of the school, when I wrote a simple game during my programming classes, and the teacher allowed me to skip all the remaining course after he played it. But of course, speaking seriously, success is a relative term, and many years later, when my brother Semyon and I released *Cut The Rope*, it was astonishing to see our game reaching the top and landing on the millions of the devices worldwide."

Why do you think your game(s) struck a chord with players?
"One of the main reasons is the game character, Om Nom, who was able to establish a sort of the emotional connection with the players. Some of them told us that even after completing the game they occasionally launch it just to look at Om Nom, at his cute emotions – it makes them happier and acts like a stress reliever. "

In terms of development advantages/ challenges, what does iOS/Android offer over other platforms?
"Both these platforms have a great community, development tools and App Stores. Of course, there's always a space for improvement, and challenges are sometimes tough, like trying to fit your app into the 50Mb limit. However, when I recall the time when I was developing for J2ME phones, which were very limited in CPU performance, had poor screens and were vastly fragmented, I realise that mobile industry has made a great step forward during the last decade."

What is the secret to creating a successful iOS/Android game?
"Keep your eyes open on emergent trends, analyse success factors of the top games (as well as fail factors of the good, but unsuccessful games), stick with easy-to-understand game concepts, regularly check feedback during the development, and polish. Then polish. And then a bit more..."

"Developing games was my hobby since early childhood, actually I created my first game when I was eight or nine"

SIMON READ

// **STUDIO:** New Star Games // **KEY RELEASE**: New Star Soccer





What was your background before entering game development?
"I studied English Literature at university but didn't really know what I wanted to do with that. I ended up doing temporary jobs for a couple of years then managed to get work on an IT helpdesk."

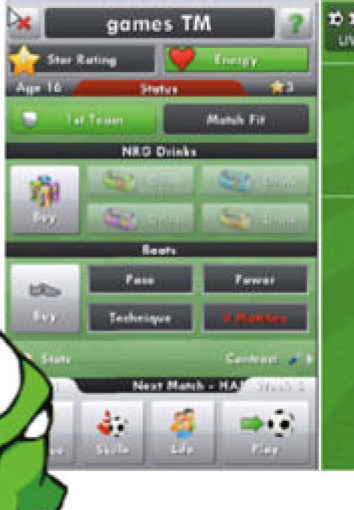
At what point in time would you say you became a successful developer?
"I became a full-time indie in 2006 after the launch of *New Star Soccer 3* on PC, so that was my first real success. It was nothing like the success I've had recently with the mobile version of the game but it was a special time for me, and a defining moment."

How has the success of your game(s) changed your life?
"For a long time I was a 'struggling indie'. There were months where things got pretty tight and the debts were mounting up. Recently though I've moved out of a two-bedroom flat and into a nice house with my wife and son, and I don't have to worry about the bills so much! Success has also brought a lot of opportunities to meet and work with other people in the industry and I get asked to do a lot of interviews. For a long time nobody cared what I had to say!"

In terms of development advantages/challenges, what does iOS/Android offer over other platforms?
"One of the challenges for me was adapting a game that I had designed for PC and joypad control to a touch screen device. Too many games fall back on an on-screen controller which I detest, and others don't take into account that most mobile gamers want bite-sized gaming but also longevity in their games. If you can solve those kinds of issues then you are giving yourself a real chance. The ease of self-publishing and the size of the market are of course huge advantages but that brings with it the problem of getting visibility on the stores. Fortunately *New Star Soccer* found its way up the charts pretty quickly and once you do it is easier to stay there."

What is the secret to creating a successful iOS/Android game?
"[Laughs] The magic sauce? Make a game you are proud of."

"Success has brought a lot of opportunities to meet and work with other people in the industry and I get asked to do a lot of interviews. For a long time nobody cared what I had to say!"







WHY I ❤...

Wing Commander

CHRIS MCQUINN,
DRINKBOX DESIGNER

For me, Wing Commander easily sits atop the pile of my favourite games. I routinely would get my hands on various joysticks to see which one I think would simulate a space yoke most realistically. The game itself really demonstrated an elegant combination of narrative, gameplay, and rewards. Each mission unlocked more background story of the evil Kilrathi and their intentions, along with filling my electronic locker with heroic medals. Gaining rank was awesome! Needless to say I've been really excited about the upcoming title Star Citizen *being the 'successor' to* Wing Commander*, although, that is a lofty, lofty goal.*



"I've been really excited about the upcoming title Star Citizen being the 'successor' to Wing Commander, although that is a lofty goal"

CHRIS MCQUINN, DRINKBOX

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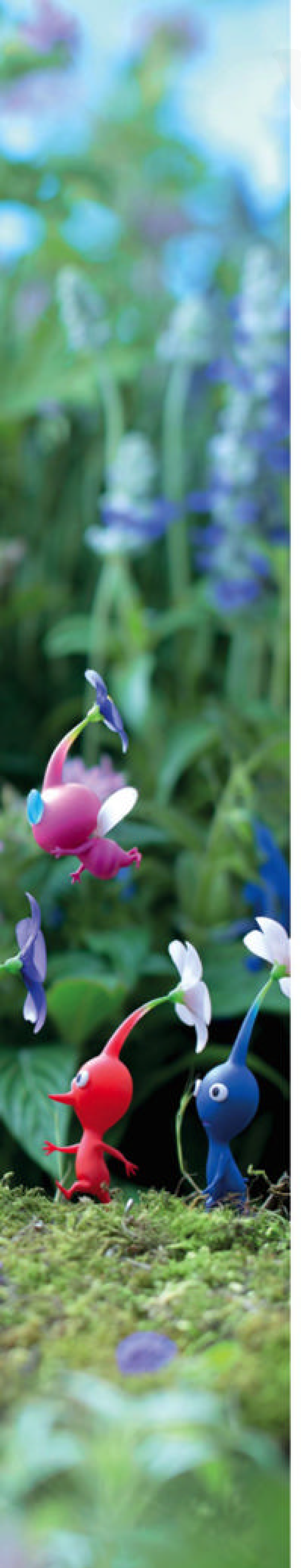
Reviews



106

Pikmin 3

Wii U's potential is finally realised



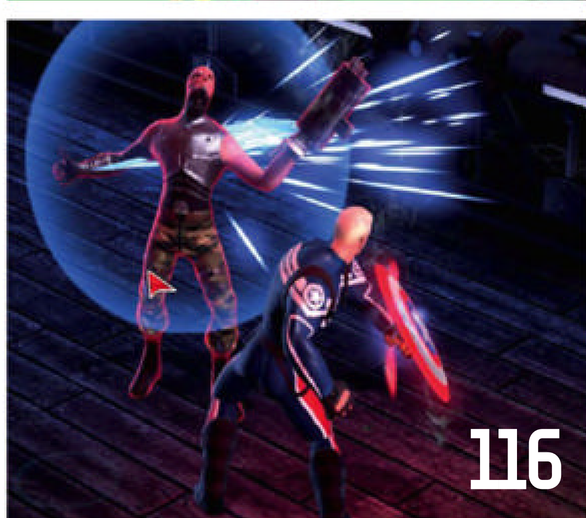
THE AVERAGE

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THE GALAXY'S MOST ADORABLE DICTATOR RETURNS

Pikmin 3

***Pikmin 3* is, at its heart, a game about collectivism, and the fragility of the individual.** It sounds lofty, given the cute visuals, but if you've played *Pikmin*, you'll know what we mean. In pursuit of your goals, you'll send dozens if not hundreds of the titular creatures to their deaths, and though they look like plants they panic and shriek and die like animals, leaving naught behind but a tiny, fleeting ghost. The game has no explicit circle of life message to ease the blow either, just the tale of three explorers from a planet suffering from an ecological disaster, looking for food and a way to get it home to save their starving species. Their goal is perhaps more noble than that with which Olimar found himself in *Pikmin 2*, but it still requires the use of the indigenous population of the planet on which they've crash-landed as pack mules, construction workers, and cannon fodder. *Pikmin 3* will turn you into a Machiavellian dictator, but it's so compelling that you just won't care.

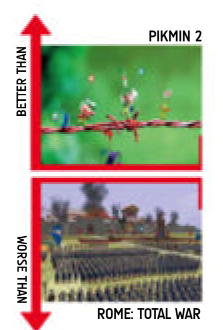
To coax you through the game, this sequel has taken the formula from its predecessors and fine-tuned it with care. Where *Pikmin* and *Pikmin 2* each had a singular goal – in the former to recover the parts of the Dolphin spaceship before Olimar's oxygen ran out, and in the latter to find enough treasure to pay off a debt – *Pikmin 3* has several, and balances them with limitations that sit somewhere between the strict deadline of *Pikmin* and the free rein of *Pikmin 2*. The explorers must find enough fruit both to use the seeds for repopulation of their home planet's flora and to feed themselves one per day as they go, and while you'll almost certainly finish the game before they've managed to consume all of the fruit they could gather (which is hopefully not all of the fruit available on the planet, or PNF-404 will end up like Koppai), the need to maintain a food supply prevents you from ploughing through the story without a care.

As is traditional in the series, you can also only get a certain amount done before sunset, at which point you have to gather up any stray *Pikmin* – who'll become supper if they can't get back to their "Onion" home before the nighttime predators arrive – and fly up into orbit for the night. Another limitation lies in your *Pikmin* population: you start with a few of each colour and will soon build up a sizeable army plus overstock (since you're only allowed to let 100 roam free on the surface at any one time), but environmental hazards and those relatively gigantic predators can cut through swathes of the critters in no time. So you have to be mindful of multiple variables, but then that's what makes for a good strategy game.

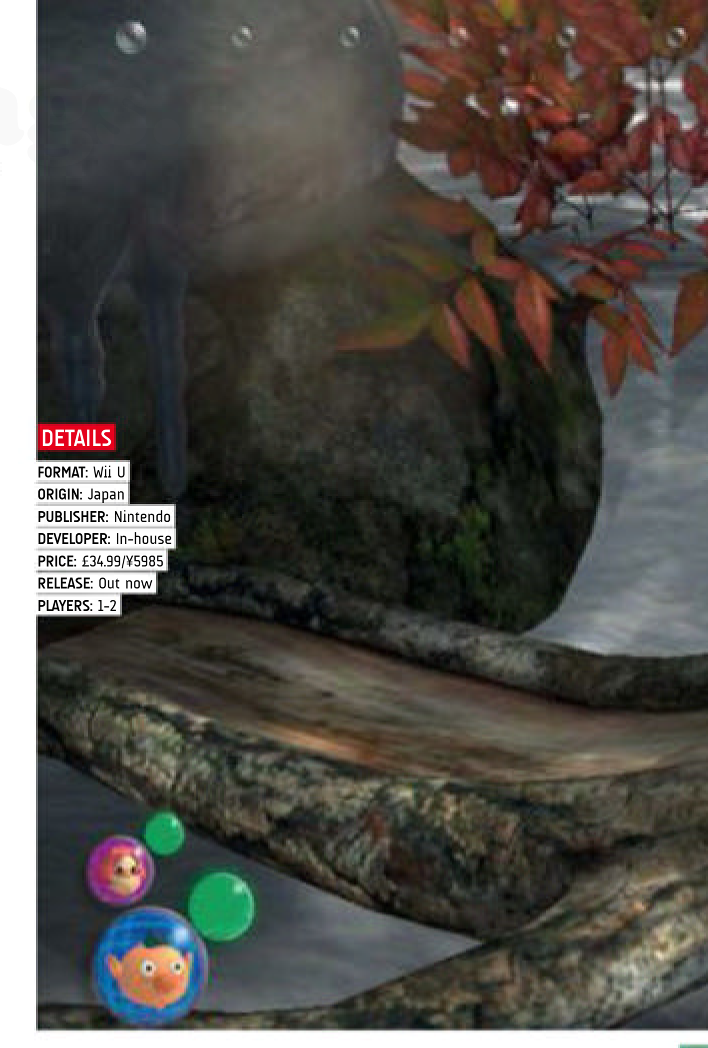
WORLWIDE
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

SMILE: Unfortunately, you'll have to stick with local multiplayer for the "Mission" and "Bingo Battle" modes, but you can expect the photo-sharing feature to turn Pikmin into the new Lolcats.

Plot-wise, *Pikmin 3* also offers more of a progression than the first two games. Though most of your actions – gathering a population of Pikmin, locating the different varieties of fruit – are largely self-determined, the story is split into key moments explained in one-line directives on your log screen: "Defeat the Vehemoth Phosbat!" "Follow the Mystery Signal!" Your first task is to help Alph to find his fellow crew members, Brittany the Botanist and Charlie the Captain, who've landed in different regions of the planet. Exploration of those regions and the reunion of the colleagues will take a few in-game days, and then you'll spend a good deal of time extending your reach across the four main territories of the game. Some way in, you'll encounter a challenge that changes the pace and leads into the climax that preludes the end to this basic three-act structure.



PIKMIN 3 WILL TURN YOU INTO A MACHIAVELLIAN DICTATOR, BUT IT'S SO COMPELLING THAT YOU JUST WON'T CARE



DETAILS
FORMAT: Wii U
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £34.99/¥5985
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-2

Below: The Flying Pikmin make a valuable addition to the team. The cute little things aren't much good in a fight on the ground, but they can take on flying insects and carry items over gaps that other Pikmin couldn't cross.



Above: They may all have the same abilities when it comes to leading Pikmin, but each crew member has a unique personality: Alph is focused on the mission, Brittany is focused on food, and Charlie is focused on, well, Brittany.

"MISSION" MODE

The different challenges in the "Mission" mode require just as much planning as the campaign, especially if you tackle them alone. Each has a time limit, so you have to decide how much time you can afford to spend building up your initially small collection of Pikmin before you set out to do the real work, which is obviously increasingly easier the more Pikmin you have to do it. In the treasure-hunting mission, you also have to factor in the different values of the treasure. Do you spend a couple of minutes clearing a path to the far side of the map so that you can reach the gold strawberry, or instead collect the many but less valuable fruits close by?

Left: PNF-404 hosts a variety of climates, from the tropical to the snowy. It's a wonder that the tiny Pikmin aren't bothered by the falling rain, especially when most of them can't even stand a puddle without panicking.

Below: Yellow Pikmin provide a useful replacement for copper wire; string enough of them together and you can reconnect a broken circuit so effectively that it magically stays connected even when you call them back to your side.



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

56 MINS

You start off with only Red Pikmin and then add the Rock type, and may not have reunited the three crew members until a couple of hours into the game.

6 HOURS

The "Sandbelching Meerslug" is the third of the big bosses you'll face, and will probably munch on many of your Pikmin before you manage to take it down.

2 DAYS

Once you've finished the campaign you won't want to stop, so you'll either start again from the beginning or dive into the additional modes like the multiplayer "Bingo Battle".



At the end of each day, one of the crew members will write a brief journal entry that describes their goals or what actions they undertook that day, and the game is clever enough that these entries will closely reflect what choices you made. If you came across one of the boss creatures but didn't manage to defeat it that day, for example, the crew member will write about the attempt and pledge to try again tomorrow. The crew can chat in their spaceship at the end of the day too, which happens automatically when something major happens in the story but is optional otherwise, though it's a shame to skip the opportunity, as both the journal entries and these conversations serve to make the game feel more personal to the player, reactive as they are to his or her actions.

Labelled objectives aside, the bulk of the game lies in that exploration of uncharted territories, blacked out on your map until you've found a way to get to them. And the PNF-404 of *Pikmin 3* is a world that begs to be toured. *Pikmin* looked beautiful because it was so different from other games, set in a world of giant flowers and insects and tin cans. *Pikmin 3* looks beautiful because the power of the Wii U has allowed for high-definition shimmering water and rustling leaves, and a much improved collection of animations for the Pikmin themselves. If you're not careful, you might waste valuable time watching them carry fragments of pottery like ants carry leaves, marching along with their oversized cargo held aloft. And the fruit is so attractive it'll make you want to go and eat some in real life, which can only be a good thing.

The lure of the great unknown and the promise of more fruit lying around the bend pull you through the game, and in fact you won't actually uncover every corner of these lands until the end. That's the other clever limitation of this game, as with each in the series: the fact that each type of Pikmin, discovered at intervals throughout the game, allows you to overcome particular obstacles and reach new areas. Red Pikmin can walk through flames, Yellow Pikmin through electricity, and Blue Pikmin through water. Rock Pikmin can break through tough barriers, and Flying Pikmin can lift objects into the air.

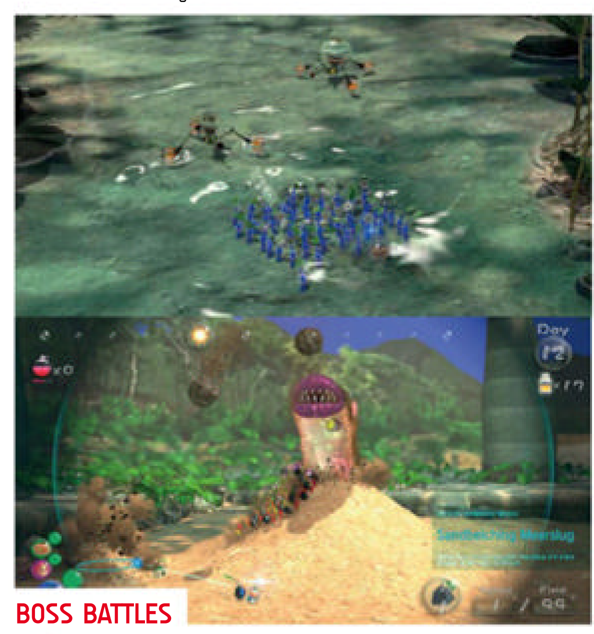
Some fans of *Pikmin 2* might be disappointed to discover that Purple Pikmin and White Pikmin haven't made it into the campaign (though they are in the additional modes) but the two new species provide the variety needed to prevent this sequel from feeling stale, and seven unit types would have been just too many for a game like this. As it is, five unit

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

TRIPLE-TEAM: If two heads are better than one, then a three-way division of the workload is invaluable. **MY KOPPAD:** As the KopPad is for the crew, your GamePad is an incredibly useful additional tool.

Below: In case you forgot, only the blue Pikmin can resist a horrible death of drowning in five centimetres of water.



BOSS BATTLES

Most of the creatures that threaten the Pikmin are larger than they are, but over the course of the game you'll come across half a dozen that are much, much bigger and require more than brute force to take down. To tackle a huge sandworm-type creature, for example, you have to wait for it to suck a crater in the ground on which and your Pikmin stand and then have one of your loyal followers throw an explosive rock into its greedy mouth, at which point it'll be thrown to the surface for your Pikmin to pile on to.

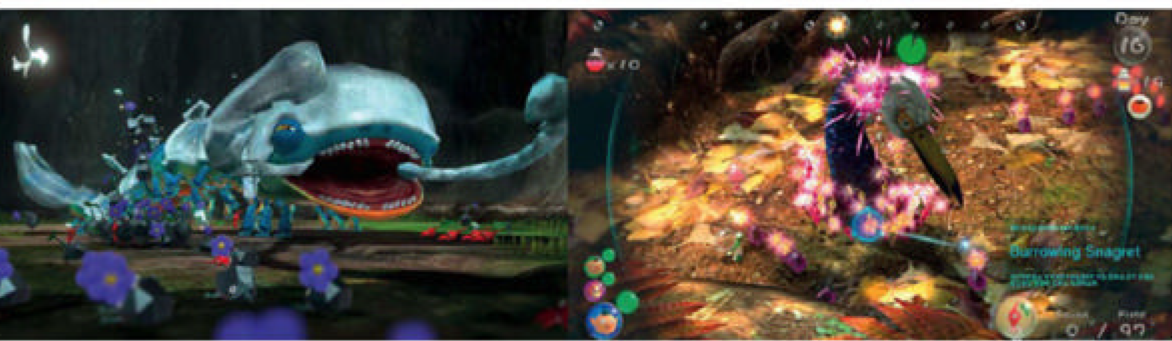
Once you've defeated these bosses in the campaign, you can hone your techniques – alone or with a friend – in the "Mission" mode.



Left: The diminutive size of the crew and Pikmin lets you do cool stuff like ride on a lily pad. The world will open up to you when you finally access the Blue Pikmin that will follow you through water.

Below: You never know which variety of angry wildlife will feel your wrath next.

Left: Seriously, watching your Pikmin pluck shiny grapes from a bunch or escort a bright red apple will make you crave fruit.



types is a lot for one character to manage, which is presumably why *Pikmin 3* has taken the multitasking element from *Pikmin 2* and expanded upon it. Instead of Olimar and Louie, you now have three characters to control (we can only assume that *Pikmin 4* will have a gang of four), each of whom can be doing a different thing at the same time. So you might set Alph to get the Rock Pikmin started on breaking down a solid wall, then switch to Brittany and have her lead a troop of Blue Pikmin to collect a piece of fruit from the riverbed, all while Charlie keeps watch over the rest as they collect pottery fragments to build a bridge.

As well as adding an extra layer of strategy, this tactic fits well with our modern, multitasking lives. Just as we are no longer content to wait for a bus without playing on our phones, you don't have to spend time with nothing to do but watch your Pikmin carry out their tasks and can instead switch to another character to keep things moving. Given this ability to have three separate characters focusing on disparate tasks, it seems cooperative multiplayer would have been a natural fit, but unfortunately the campaign is single-player only. Perhaps Nintendo is banking on players being poor

Above: When the boss battles require techniques as varied as shattering a creature's protective casing to have at its softer underparts or throwing explosive rocks into a gaping mouth, you know it's going to be satisfying to beat each one.

FAQs

Q. TIME TO COMPLETION?
It could take around 45 in-game days (around 18 hours) to finish the story without collecting every item.

Q. ARE ROCK PIKMIN STRONG?
While not as strong as Purple Pikmin, Rock Pikmin are tough and cannot be squished like their comrades.

Q. WHERE IS OLIMAR?
You don't get to play as Olimar, but you might pick up hints of what he's been up to.

THE FRUIT IS SO ATTRACTIVE IT'LL MAKE YOU WANT TO GO AND EAT SOME IN REAL LIFE

at multitasking and thinks that co-op would remove too much of the challenge.

This single-player multitasking is, however, made easier by a new "Go here!" function that makes use of the GamePad. The map displayed on the screen of the controller is useful anyway because it's convenient to glance down rather than pressing a button to bring up a map on the television screen, but it also enables you to trace a path for a character to follow automatically. As you drag your finger across the map, you'll see a top-down view of the world move around on the TV screen (unless you're playing on TV-off mode, which is an option), so you can follow the path yourself while the game is paused to make sure that no threats lie in the character's way, and then send them off with a gaggle of Pikmin and forget about them until they let you know they've arrived.

You can play with the Wii Remote and Nunchuk, which makes it easier to aim when throwing Pikmin at a target or rounding them up with a whistle, but the "Go here!" feature makes it more convenient to play with the GamePad. It's more than just a map, too. Your version of the "KopPads" carried by the crew members, the GamePad can provide you with information on your Pikmin population, the fruit you've gathered, and the data files (left behind by a previous explorer) you've found. It also doubles as a camera with zoom and focus and flash, so you can take screenshots and post them to the Miiverse.

Other improvements to the *Pikmin* formula include the expansion of the additional game modes, each level of which contains levels set in a variant on one of the worlds from the campaign. Fortunately, these modes can be played with a friend. In fact, "Bingo Battle" is multiplayer only, as you and your opponent scrabble to collect four items to make a row on your bingo cards or – if you've gone for the option to win this way – nab each other's macaroons, à la Capture The Flag. You can see what your opponent is doing, but then they can see what you're up to as well, so the game isn't unbalanced. The other additional mode, "Mission", is split into three kinds of challenges with multiple unlockable levels in each: treasure collection, creature annihilation, and boss battles. You can tackle these alone, but they're much easier – and more enjoyable – in co-op.

These additional modes are a lot of fun, providing as they do bite-size portions of *Pikmin* action that you can enjoy with a friend, and definitely give you a reason to keep coming back to the game. But honestly, the campaign has so many nooks and crannies to explore and hidden fruit and data files to find that once you've reached the end of the story you'll want to jump back in straight away. *This* time, you'll say, I'll find everything. This time, I won't let so many Pikmin die.

VERDICT 9/10
A SEQUEL THAT ONLY IMPROVES UPON ITS PREDECESSORS

THE RETURN OF THE KING

Company Of Heroes 2

For a time it looked as if *Company Of Heroes 2* would never see the light of day. Developer Relic Entertainment has had a rollercoaster seven years since the release of *Company Of Heroes*, unleashing a slew of expansion packs for its impressive roster of RTS games and another uncomfortable venture onto consoles – the fall of THQ could have been the end of the journey. Sega swooped in and saved the company, bidding 26.6 million dollars for the studio at auction, perhaps on the strength of the long awaited sequel to one of the most beloved real-time strategy games ever.

Company Of Heroes 2 doesn't set out to evolve the RTS genre, instead it strives to iterate on the solid foundation of its predecessor. Many will find this welcome news, but *Company Of Heroes 2* has a tendency to reveal itself as a product of the early 2000s, instead of one from 2013. It's unashamedly traditional in a sense; a love letter sent directly to the PC crowd that so desperately seeks out the hardcore heritage of RTS games long abandoned by other developers.

Shifting the fight to the Eastern Front, *Company Of Heroes 2* boasts quite the theatre of war, letting players relive some of the bloodiest battles of World War II. Taking up arms as a disgraced commander in the Soviet Red Army, it's easy to applaud Relic for forging such a strong narrative through its lengthy campaign. The story itself is predictable enough, and not solely down to Relic ripping pages from a well-documented part of history, but because of the campaign's heavy slant on the futility of war. Your squad will be torn to ribbons before your eyes, questions will be asked of merciless orders and the horror of barrier troops will be laid before you – the plot can be uncomfortable, but it sure is engaging.

Like its predecessor, *Company Of Heroes 2* does away with the traditional rock-paper-scissors approach to combat, instead asking players adapt to using real world tactics to tackle objectives. In the battle for authenticity versus playability, Relic seems to have struck a comfortable balance. Facing an immediate threat head-on will often lead to disaster, so cover and flanks need to be utilised to survive. A full squad of infantry can be wiped off of the map in seconds by a well-positioned MG nest, and you'll find men will need to be sacrificed to try and suppress the enemy whilst you send others to flank the position for a clean kill. It's almost become a given in RTS games that a large army can turn the tide of battle, here it just leads to faster bloodshed – never have personal expectations been reassessed so quickly. Some occasional path finding issues did arise, however, with AI finding inventive (suicidal) ways to navigate terrain. Should waist high walls and fences not be specifically clicked over while planning a daring flank, everything will fall apart before your eyes. It, again, is another conceit of taking aim at the hardcore audience – in focusing on heritage

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: N/A
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Relic
PRICE: £34.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-8
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

Right: Players hoping to survive *Company Of Heroes 2*'s brutal combat will need to utilise a blend a raw strategy skill, quick fingers and a collected mind. As soon as you take your attention away from building new units, everything falls apart.



Right: The single-player campaign is well worth your time, as Relic has created a wonderfully engaging narrative to follow along with. It's a little war-time cheesy, for certain, but it is enjoyable none the less.

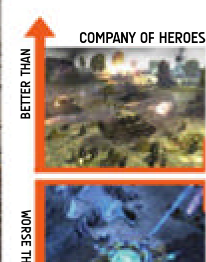


Above Right: Taking place on the Eastern Front, the cold will have an effect on your soldiers. As blizzards roll in, shelter or heat must quickly be found unless you want to face a cold death.

IN THE BATTLE FOR AUTHENTICITY VERSUS PLAYABILITY, RELIC SEEMS TO HAVE STRUCK A COMFORTABLE BALANCE

FURTHER READING: COMPANY OF HEROES 2 | PREVIEW | ISSUE 135 | PAGE 46





FAQs

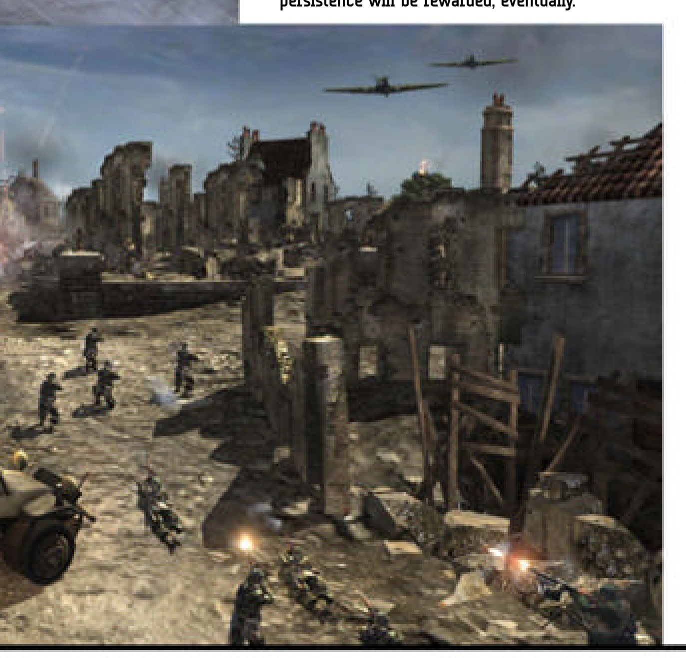
Q. WORTH THE WAIT?
After seven years away, this is a happy return to form.

Q. IS THE WEATHER SYSTEM ANY GOOD?
Being in the winter of Russia, blizzards now sweep the battlefield freezing the troops caught in the open to death. It feels a tad contrived.

Q. HARDCORE ONLY?
Company Of Heroes certainly won't hold your hand, and an arbitrary tutorial mission does little to help you keep your head above water.

WELCOME HOME

For fans of the RTS genre, *Company Of Heroes 2* will be a welcome return to form. The game's core mechanics are nothing to write home about, so to speak, with Relic simply opting to refine the solid foundations it had lain seven years ago with the first *Company Of Heroes* – but when you combine the gameplay with the wonderful visual, sound and voice acting direction, then you'll find a complete package that's hard to ignore. For new players, however, the game can be tough to breach. The lack of any real tutorial means all but the most basic of systems are left a mystery, and in a game so reliant on quick decisions and quicker fingers, it can be a tough experience to crack. Those with persistence will be rewarded, eventually.



over accessibility many of *Company Of Heroes*' design choices will confuse new players, but likely delight veterans of the series.

Company Of Heroes 2 takes pride in cutting through battalions of your troops in a hail of bullets and blood, assured victory is always out of your grasp – with a well-placed mortar shell or Panzer tank reducing your steady advance to a desperate game of bunkering down with two fingers crossed. It's easy to get overwhelmed, especially when you inevitably focus on violence instead of build orders, but it never feels unfair.

The same can't be said for the few major additions to the flow of combat in *Company Of Heroes 2*. While a lot of the core mechanics have simply received a polish, the addition of dynamic weather effects feel like a design choice informed by hardware, more than anything else.

Fog of war has been implemented, with the viewable map now restricted to but a few feet ahead of your frontline soldiers. Grenades and exploding tanks will bellow smoke across your field of vision, forcing both your troops, and the enemies, to explore new routes to conflict. Many games have implemented line of sight in innovative ways for years now, *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* as a recent example, but it certainly helps to ramp up the difficulty and welcomed stress of planning an assault in *Company Of Heroes*.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

SUBTLE IMPROVEMENTS: The original *Company Of Heroes* is well loved, so Relic took the simple route and simply iterated on what's come before, instead of trying to evolve the franchise.

An addition that isn't as welcome, however, is that of randomly generated blizzards that roll in across the battlefield. Anyone caught in the open will quickly perish as the harsh winds of the Eastern front freeze soldiers, the battle quickly shifts as players move to huddle soldiers around camp fires or inside buildings for cover. It unnaturally breaks the flow of battle, especially when you get inventive and use the time to sacrifice some men to hose buildings in fire as the enemy combatants helplessly burn inside. Die by fire or by ice, nobody said war was easy.

Company Of Heroes 2 will be a welcome return to a forgotten form of RTS for many. The game's core mechanics and systems are easy to grasp, but new players will quickly find themselves overwhelmed by the pace and brutality of the combat. In many ways, that's okay – seven years waiting for the series to return proper and Relic know how to appease its fans, that much is certain. At the end of it all, *Company Of Heroes 2* is the whole package. If your PC can handle it, expect a beautifully bloody trip through one of the most horrific times in history. From its thundering sound design to the intricately polished RTS mechanics, this is another unmissable release from Relic Entertainment.

VERDICT 8/10
THE KING OF WARTIME RTS RETURNS IN IMPRESSIVE FASHION

WE HAVE TO GO DEEPER…

Mario & Luigi: Dream Team Bros.

DETAILS

FORMAT: 3DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: AlphaDream
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

Valiant heroes, mysterious worlds, nefarious villains and a character in peril that requires saving. Epic RPG or Super Mario? Why not both?

Mario & Luigi: Dream Team Bros. is the fourth instalment in AlphaDream's excellent handheld RPG series. We open with Mario, Luigi and Princess Peach visiting tourist destination Pi'llo Island. An accidental ruin excavation ends with the team finding a mysterious stone pillow, which the apparently narcoleptic Luigi promptly falls asleep on. This is no ordinary pillow; a portal into Luigi's dreams opens and sucks in Princess Peach. Mario leaps through the portal in pursuit and we have a rescue mission on our hands. It isn't a particularly original set-up even by Nintendo's standards, but the story takes some interesting twists and turns and probably won't turn out the way you predict.

Gameplay will be immediately familiar to fans of the series. Exploring Pi'llo Island takes place on a 3D plane from a top-down perspective, Mario and Luigi travelling in tandem with a separate jump button for each. Monsters litter the landscape and coming into contact with one pulls the player into a side-on, turn-based battle with action elements.

Again, old hands will know the score here. The brothers can choose from a few core attacks, from the classic head-stomp to a hefty whack with a mallet. Each makes use of timed button presses for extra damage, and not every move works on each enemy. Don't jump on something with a spiky shell, for example – basic stuff. The duo can also perform Bros. Attacks – powerful special moves that control in interesting ways – for a resource cost. Enemy attacks can be dodged and countered with timely jumps or hammer strikes, and careful players could theoretically finish the game without ever getting hit. It's a clever mix of RPG

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

OPTIONS: Exploring Luigi's dreams is the most original part of the game. Manipulating the sleeping brother's face on the touch screen to affect the environment in his dream is inspired.



Above: This picture should be self-explanatory. Mario is performing a "Luiginary attack", the dream-world equivalent of the team-up "Bros. attack" moves. He is riding a huge ball made up of dream-clones of his brother, about to punt it at a group of monsters. Poetry.

Below: It's heartening to still see sprites in games, especially when they are as well-animated and full of life as they are here. Clever shading makes the 2D characters blend in wonderfully with the 3D environments, creating a look that is natural yet distinct.

Below: Trips through the dream world are full of vivid, surreal imagery and make wonderful use of the console's 3D effects.







FAQs

Q. ANY RETURNING CHARACTERS?

Yep. Aside from the regular cast, Starlow from *Bowser's Inside Story* makes a return.

Q. HOW LONG IS IT?

Gameplay might be simple, but there's plenty here. Expect to get a decent 20 hours at least.

Q. CAN YOU GET A BUSTER SWORD?

Nope, sorry. Hammers and feet are the weapons of choice here.

Below: Tickle Luigi's nose as he sleeps and he sneezes, creating huge gusts of wind in the dream world. Watching his sleeping brow frown as you scratch at his face is hilarious.

EVERYTHING IS KEPT BASIC WITH THE AIM OF BEING ACCESSIBLE TO NEWCOMERS, BUT IT DOESN'T NEGATIVELY AFFECT THE EXPERIENCE

and platforming that feels both familiar and unique simultaneously.

So far, so standard, but *Dream Team Bros.* sets itself apart from its predecessors with Mario's jaunts into Luigi's dreams. Trips into the dream world always take place from a 2D perspective, instantly differentiating them from the "real world" segments. Luigi may be asleep, but as these are his dreams he is still able to join his brother and lend him a hand. Dreamy Luigi, as the game adorably titles him, is capable of great things in the world of his own imagination and it is here we see the most original ideas AlphaDream has to offer.

Dreamy Luigi can turn himself into various aspects of the dream's environment to help his diminutive brother advance. As Mario explores on the top screen, Luigi is shown snoozing on the bottom, and manipulating his sleepy face can affect the item he has possessed in his dream. If Mario needs to reach a high ledge, Luigi can possess a nearby tree. The player can then stretch Luigi's moustache on the touch screen, which does the same to a leafy branch, grabbing Mario and slinging him to the high platform. It's a neat concept with some fun uses, like scratching Luigi's nose to get him to sneeze, causing a huge gust of dream wind. Our favourite power is the lanky jade plumber cloning himself multiple times, Mario riding atop a pillar of Luigis and busting through bad guys as a hilarious juggernaut.

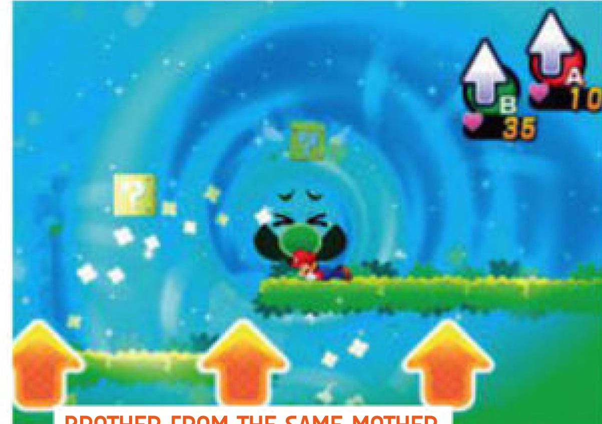
Dream Team Bros. is undoubtedly an RPG, albeit a simple one. Mario and Luigi gain experience, level up and equip gear in a manner any gamer will understand. Everything is kept basic with the aim of being accessible to newcomers, but it doesn't negatively affect the experience. Players do have a little control on how the brothers level up, choosing a stat to gain a bonus boost each level and specific perks as new ranks are reached. Further customisation comes in equipping different gear and badges, which combine to create effects during battle. Those looking for a challenge can attempt expert trials, giving you additional goals to accomplish during battle.

It's a simple game but clever design keeps it from ever being boring. Players are constantly given new things to do and a slow drip feed of new abilities keeps things interesting. The game uses 2D character sprites on 3D backgrounds and makes great use of the console's 3D effect. This is some of the most unobtrusive yet useful 3D we've seen on the system, with the extra depth creating a sense of space and visual effects bursting off the screen. Even if you tend to turn the 3D off by default, it's worth trying here. The sprites are also excellent, evoking a childish sense of fun with some wonderful animation. Luigi in particular is a joy to watch, full of bumbling enthusiasm as he poses after a level up. It's a lovely looking game start to finish, especially when you channel *Inception* and go even deeper into Luigi's dreams.

Special mention must go to the localization team, who have done a wonderful job of instilling *Dream Team Bros.* with a sense of bizarre humour that will entertain kids and adults alike. *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* showed Nintendo's whimsical translation at its best, and the precedent is upheld here. The biggest flaw with *Dream Team Bros.* is the simple fact that it really isn't that different from the three games that came before it. We don't think many people are expecting drastic reinvention from Nintendo and the new features are well received, but this is still, in essence, the same game.

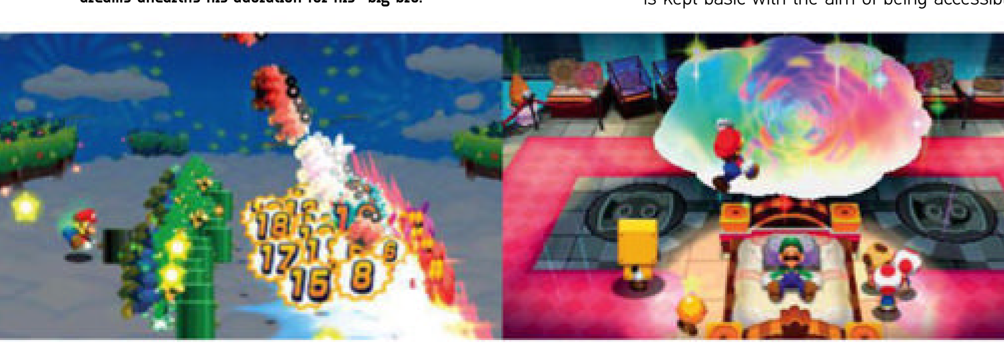
Otherwise, this is an easy game to recommend, full of humour and charm, accessible for newcomers but not boring for veterans. The 3DS continues to go from strength to strength, and great titles like *Mario & Luigi: Dream Team Bros.* are the reason why.





BROTHER FROM THE SAME MOTHER

"Bros. Attacks" see our Italian fratelli teaming up to take out enemy monsters in a number of inventive and amusing ways. Each controls differently, from kicking a shell between the two like a game of tennis or steering Mario with the 3DS as he rides on a giant ball of Dreamy Luigis and guides it directly into a group of bad guys. The two work together outside of battle also, with Luigi squashing Mario with a mallet so he can fit through tight spots. The trusting relationship between the brothers is one of the best things about the story, and delving deep into Luigi's dreams unearths his adoration for his "big bro."



VERDICT 8/10
ENGAGING RPG FUN FOR ALL – A DREAM

LOST IN SPACE

Dust 514

Within the farthest reaches of the Tranquility server, a tale of debauchery and deception is always waiting to be told. CCP Games' *Eve Online* is an MMO that, by nature, is driven by conflict. It's often heralded as one of the most interesting games to read about, but for the inexperienced player, one of the most boring to actually play. This is a mantra that continues to ring true as CCP expands *Eve* out of the stars and down onto the planets that are so hotly contested by the corporations above.

While *Eve Online* has had ten years to perfect its world, *Dust 514* feels like it is in desperate need of a decade of evolution, with the current build simply in no shape to move out of the shadow of its peers. It doesn't have the community to drive great conversation and the gameplay isn't solid enough to create captivating play, *Dust* is in a limbo period that – as the beta has shown – has plenty of room to grow despite its initial faults.

As we mentioned above, *Dust* has evolved plenty since its beta days, but the mundane moment-to-moment gameplay still sours what is otherwise a highly ambitious undertaking by CCP. The vast array of weaponry on hand does little to make you feel like an intergalactic soldier, with sluggish handling only serving to poison the experience of diving into drawn-out firefights with a handful of soldiers by your side. There's simply not enough precision granted with the PlayStation 3's gamepad; the guns feel light and are more than happy to wildly lead across the screen as you struggle to keep iron sights on enemies in the midst of explosions. A mouse and keyboard configuration is available but it doesn't seem sensitive enough to appease those who feel at home gaming on a PC. The sensitivity settings can be tweaked, but *Dust* never quite manages to give you the seamless control over your character's movement that is expected from modern FPS games.

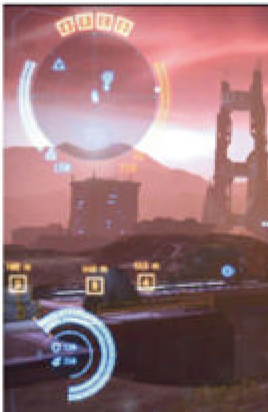
Dust's core mechanics will no doubt be evolved over time, but as it stands they don't inspire much confidence. Simply put, *Dust 514* might be an FPS that promotes an unprecedented level of depth for a console game, but under-developed shooting mechanics mean most players won't see more than a few battles before they reach for the PlayStation home button.

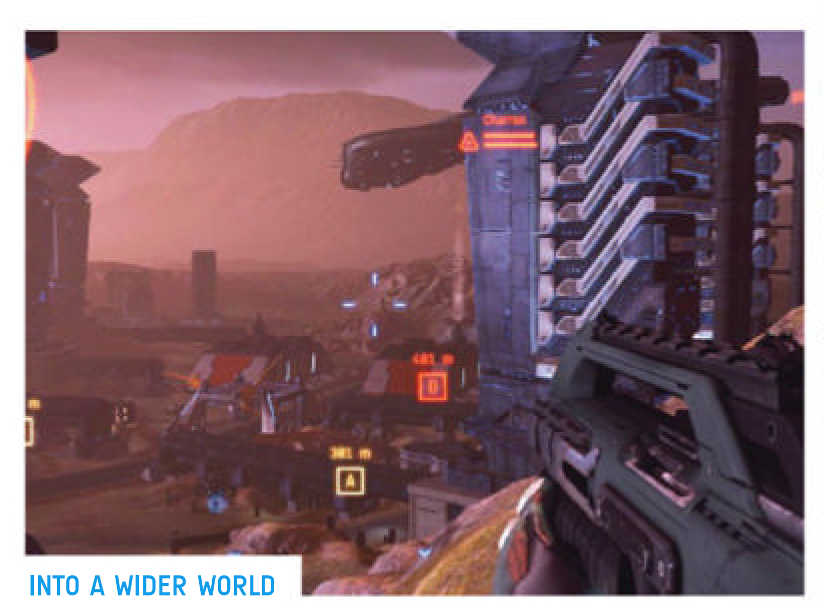
It's a shame really, as it's clear CCP has put a lot of time into creating an FPS that still



DETAILS
FORMAT: PS3
OTHER FORMATS: N/A
ORIGIN: Iceland
PUBLISHER: CCP Games
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: Free-to-play
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: MMO
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

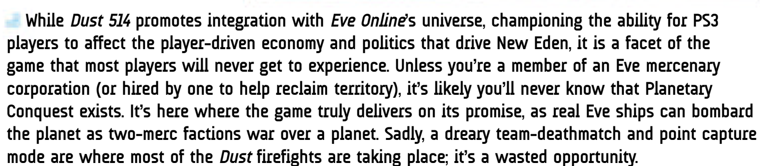
Above: The actual shooting mechanics of *Dust* leave a lot to be desired, the guns feel light and weak in your hands. It's only once you've sunk a hefty amount of hours (or money) into the game that the big guns come into play. Right: Despite the subtle improvements since its early beta days, *Dust 514* is a visually mundane game. The environments are painted with muted colours, and the textures are nothing to shout about. *Dust* needs plenty of improvements to stand with the best.



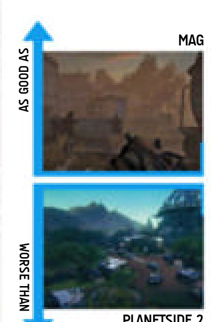




INTO A WIDER WORLD


While *Dust 514* promotes integration with *Eve Online*'s universe, championing the ability for PS3 players to affect the player-driven economy and politics that drive New Eden, it is a facet of the game that most players will never get to experience. Unless you're a member of an Eve mercenary corporation (or hired by one to help reclaim territory), it's likely you'll never know that Planetary Conquest exists. It's here where the game truly delivers on its promise, as real Eve ships can bombard the planet as two-merc factions war over a planet. Sadly, a dreary team-deathmatch and point capture mode are where most of the *Dust* firefights are taking place; it's a wasted opportunity.





feels at home within the wider *Eve* universe, though on occasion it does create a no-mans land for players not acquainted with the space-sim. Just as *Eve* lets players build their perfect spaceship, the capability to build your perfect mercenary is part of the framework of *Dust*, with players able to piece together a personal drop suit to create a near endless variety of load out options.

The complexity of the system is one of the best things about *Dust*, but the systems are hidden behind a labyrinth of unintuitive menus. Creating your drop suit is more akin to forging a mech in Chromehounds than it is to customisation found in say *Call Of Duty*, with each drop suit allowing for different combinations of weapons and equipment depending on the power and processing capabilities placed on each brand or model of suit. There's plenty to hold your attention, and if you can dedicate the time to learning how to navigate the obtrusive menus, marketplace and customisation screens, there's a highly rewarding experience to be found.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

POLISH: Considering its lengthy time in beta, *Dust 514* could really benefit from another run through QA testing. It's not that there aren't good ideas, but they really do need refining.

To support such an ambitious character tool, and the free-to-play model *Dust* has adopted, there is also a hefty grind to be found. It can feel like a walled garden for all but the most dedicated players, with each piece of gear holding its own skill requirement and prerequisites to use. The skill points required for each tier of gear and suit multiply exponentially with each rank, substantially reducing the chance of building your dream suit without opening your wallet.

Two forms of currency have been built into *Dust*; real (AUR) and in-game (ISK), with nearly every piece of gear having a AUR counterpart, sans skill requirements, allowing for faster accumulation of vital parts. It never feels like you're paying to win, though it does instil the notion that building your ultimate merc will take more time than it's worth in *Dust* without utilising your own money. Still, whether you're spending your hard earned cash or grinding ISK through battles, some form of currency is required to restock your load-outs – you lose a copy of each piece of gear equipped every time you die. For the high-end battles; it's exhilarating to get through a scrape with your gear intact and both feet firmly out of the grave. For new players however, it can be incredibly disheartening to have to switch back to the beginner 'Militia' weaponry due to lack of funds to restock your load-out.

As expected, most of *Dust 514*'s appeal is in its metagame, and the premise of joining the wider world of *Eve* is considerably more appealing and engaging than the game itself. The more time you can dedicate to *Dust*, the further the rabbit hole will go, but players looking to simply jump in to the fray sporadically, will sadly find a substantially neutered game experience.

All but the most dedicated will fail to find the connection to *Eve Online*, and despite CCP's early efforts, *Dust* feels like a game built for to appease the 500,000 subscribers the MMO houses within New Eden, while letting everyone else look in through a window with displaced curiosity.

FAQs

Q. HOW DOES IT LOOK?

Dust 514 is not a pretty game, and looks decisively early-gen at times, though it does seem to be improving with each update.

Q. HOW DOES IT HANDLE?

Again, it has its issues. The frame-rate is ever improving, but it's full of bugs that range from quiet nuances to life stealing errors.

Q. IS IT REALLY FREE-TO-PLAY?

It is, you can download it from the PS Store right now, though expect to embrace micro-transactions if you want to get anywhere.

DUST 514 FEELS LIKE IT IS IN DESPERATE NEED OF A DECADE OF EVOLUTION, TO MOVE OUT OF THE SHADOW OF ITS PEERS



Above: *Dust 514* has potentially the most expansive character customisation ever to grace a videogame, with players able to craft their own personal mercenaries. Left: While the same maps will often come up in rotation whilst fighting in team deathmatch, they are well designed. Each offers a great degree of verticality, helpful when fighting off legions of enemy troops.

VERDICT 5/10

FAILS TO CAPITALISE ON ITS AMBITION OR PROMISE

WHEN EVERYONE'S A HERO, NO ONE IS

Marvel Heroes

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Gazillion Entertainment
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: Free-to-play
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

When you slap a licence as broadly popular and loved as Marvel onto a game, whatever the game might be becomes subsidiary. In the case of *Marvel Heroes*, that's a *Diablo*-alike, thrust into the mould of an MMO with all the trimmings of a free-to-play game. You pick a hero, fight your way through familiar locales, and level up.

But the primary reason anyone will be investigating *Marvel Heroes* isn't for the well-crafted loot rates (which it doesn't have), or the satisfying thunk of knocking out a goon (which is unreliable at best). Instead people will be playing because it's Marvel; to be Captain America, or Spider-Man, or Hulk.

What they're not going to want is to be faced with a dozen copycats, thrust into a team with two other Iron Men. No one wants to feel like *a* Thing rather than The Thing, and it makes you that little bit more inclined to get away from the limited starting pool and splash out on one of the heroes offered by the in-game store.

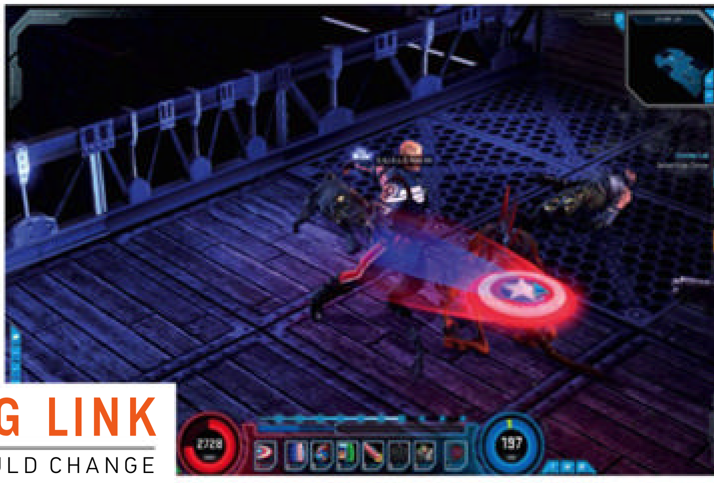
Any free-to-play game is going to be built on the players who don't pay a penny, and it's here that Marvel Heroes makes its most egregious misstep. New players start with five heroes (Storm, Scarlet Witch, Daredevil, The Thing and Hawkeye, decidedly B-list affairs), and beyond your standard two unlocks during the campaign, the chances of obtaining any others without laying down any money is almost insultingly small. You're left to rely on loot drops, which have an infinitesimal chance to occur.

Which would be fine if the heroes themselves were cheap. Instead they're ludicrously pricy, some topping out at over £15 while even the cheapest being over £5. It makes purchasing a necessity, moving from expensive shortcut to exorbitant fee. Still, if there was a solid and rewarding experience underpinning all this, we might be inclined to forgive that.

But for the most part the enemies you fight are either woefully underpowered or completely impossible, especially when it comes to bosses. Powers are hit or miss, some feeling appropriately strong and others fall flat. And even as an MMO *Marvel Heroes* sabotages itself, as finding a group is an active struggle, with matchmaking features being non-existent and communication unreliable at best.

As things stand, *Marvel Heroes* might be worth the download to take one of the free heroes through the main story, if you've got nothing better to do with eight hours. But beyond that, there's really nothing on offer here. There's the hollow shell of a game, and it feels like it's designed purely to bamboozle you for long enough that you lay down some money to see a little Spider-Man jump around and swing his web.

Above: There's an effort to make every hero feel unique, with most having a special charge meter. For example, Captain America has shield points he can spend to do more damage.



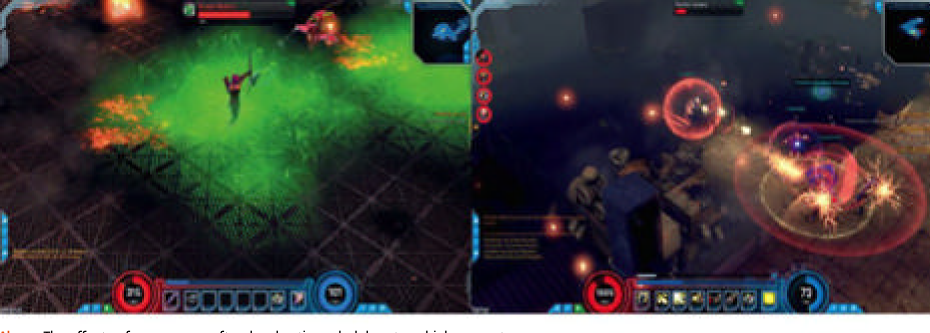
MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

LOOSEN THE PURSESTRINGS: With more generosity, Marvel Heroes wouldn't feel so miserly. It seeps through the entire game. Making the free experience better would benefit the whole game.

BETTER THAN: SPACE SIEGE

WORSE THAN: PATH OF EXILE



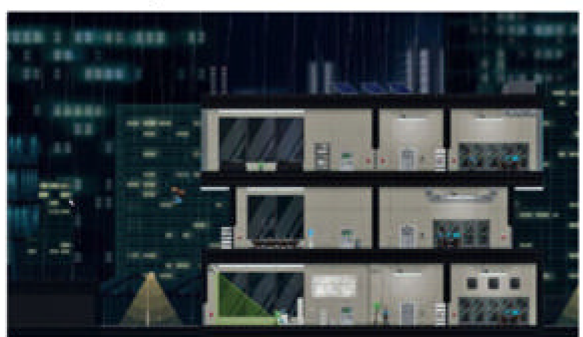
Above: The effects of powers are often bombastic and elaborate, which can get overwhelming in large groups. Luckily, there's an option to lower the amount you see.

VERDICT 4/10

COMPROMISED BY ITS BUSINESS MODEL, DISAPPOINTING

CROSSED WIRES

Gunpoint





Above: As well as being extremely clever, Gunpoint is very stylish. The noir pastiche is fun, and the music (Audio bugs notwithstanding) is a great smoky jazz affair. And being a writer, Francis' between-level dialogue is unanimously excellent.

One of the best things about the indie game scene, which is positively booming at the moment, are the stories. Not the in-game narratives, although many of those are stellar, but the plots behind the games. In triple-A, the teams are so huge and so guarded that it's almost impossible to get any sort of human interest out of these gargantuan products, but for a game like *Gunpoint*, *PC Gamer*'s Tom Francis has literally documented every part of its three year development on his personal blog.

This means his fanbase has already lived every high and low of his game's journey before release, giving the project a sense of worth and humanity that can't be said for the latest *Assassin's Creed* or *Halo*. Not that it matters if you come to the game clean – *Gunpoint* is very simple to understand, despite appearing incredibly complicated.

You play as freelance spy Richard Conway, who can leap huge distances, can't be injured by falls, and has the ability to hack into a building's circuitry and fiddle about with it. With as simple roll of the mouse wheel, you enter Crosslink mode, which turns the side-on view of the game's level into a crisscross of wires and connected devices.

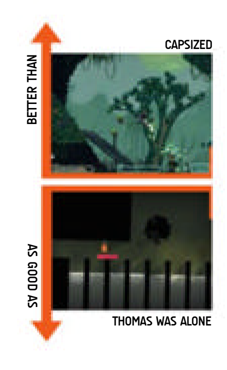
At its most basic, you can disconnect a light from its switch, and connect it to a separate switch elsewhere in the level. Conway hits the second switch, the light goes off, and a confused guard can't work out why his own lightswitch no longer works. This causes him to walk about in the dark, letting you climb the stairs behind or run up and knock him out. Lovely.

Soon, though, the potential for puzzling mischief ramps up, and you can really start toying with the world and its inhabitants. It's ostensibly a stealth game, where each mission asks you to break into a building and hack a terminal, but the possibilities the Crosslink constantly throws up makes the whole thing a hotbed for experimentation, compounded by *Gunpoint*'s approach to failure. Being spotted means a guard will fire – and kill – on sight, but you can instantly reload to one of three times in the past (usually two, six or ten seconds) meaning you're never out of the action for long. This frees you up to enjoy *Gunpoint*'s genuinely original systems rather than battling against them.

It's a lean game – clocking in at no more than three hours – but there's no fat, and Francis' sharp eye lends the between-level test message banter a classic Lucasarts feel. *Gunpoint* is a stylish, clever and highly concentrated bit of fun, then, and comes highly recommended. And that's the story that matters the most.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Self-published
DEVELOPER: Tom Francis
PRICE: £6.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1



FINGERPRINT

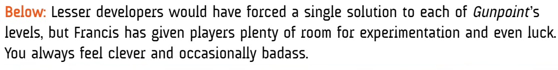
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

ROLL OVER: A quick roll of the mouse wheel changes the entire level's visuals, letting you see and manipulate the electrical wiring. It's a great little technique, and surprisingly effective.

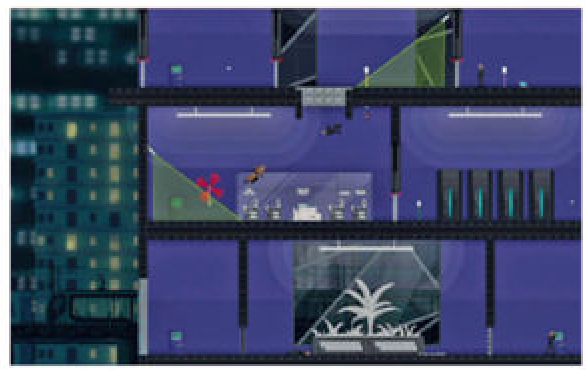


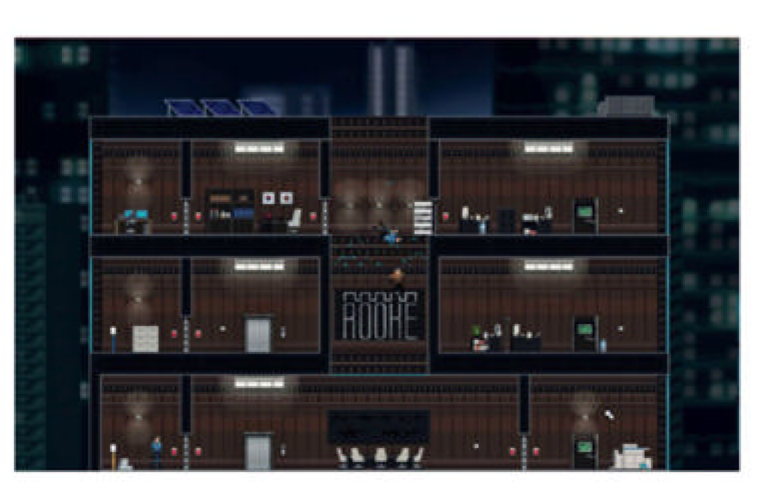
VERDICT 8/10

BRIEF BUT BRILLIANTLY BRAINY

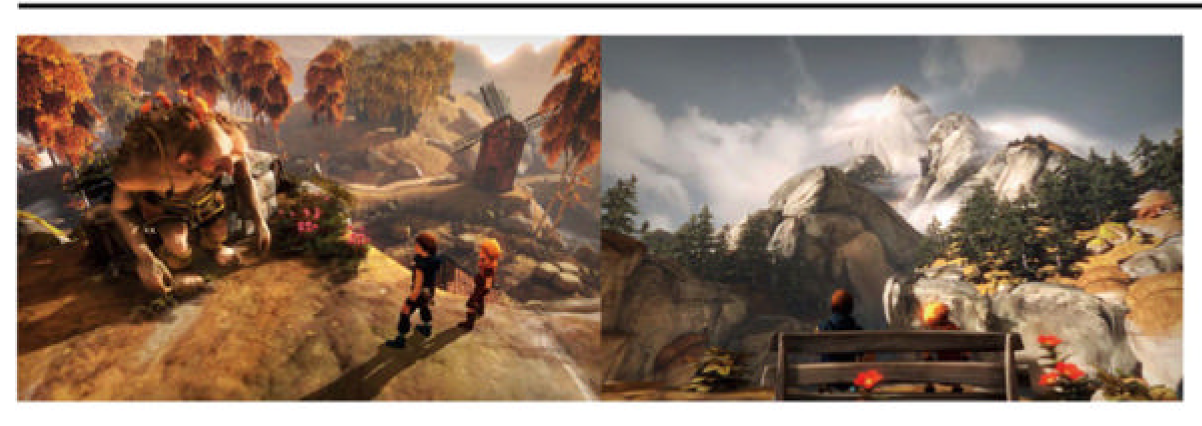


Below: Lesser developers would have forced a single solution to each of *Gunpoint*'s levels, but Francis has given players plenty of room for experimentation and even luck. You always feel clever and occasionally badass.









Left: Along the way you meet animals and fantasy creatures with different allegiances, some of which are integral to puzzle solving, and the overarching story. Others, like a cat, you can just give a hug.

SKIP THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF IN FAVOUR OF A BOND BETWEEN BROTHERS

Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons

The story for *Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons* is easily its strongest feature, not simply in the overall tale itself, but in the way it is relayed to the player. It starts with a young boy standing in front of a grave, remembering how his mother drowned while he desperately struggled to save her. Wordlessly, we're instantly connected with the boy, understanding his grief and his guilt. It's because of this understanding that we immediately know why it's so important for him, and his older brother, to try and find a way to save their only remaining parent when he falls ill.

But the father's pressing ailment is temporarily forgotten as the brothers run through their idyllic, carefree village in a slightly extended tutorial sequence. During this, you're introduced to the idea of controlling the two brothers to solve the game's many puzzles, and there's enough time to get used to the nature of each brother before being thrown into real danger. Yet it's actually the interactions with villagers themselves that begins to expose the real strength of *Brothers* – the way characters communicate, entirely without dialogue, is a narrative premise that puts this in the realm of something like *Ico*. The subtlety instils meaning into the relationship between the protagonists.

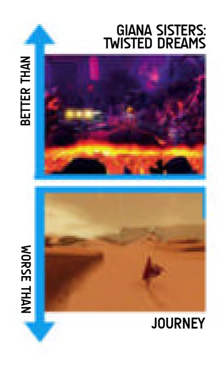
As the characters themselves don't speak English, it's up to you to pay attention to the actions of the NPCs you encounter, and to observe the world around you for clues as to what exactly is going on. Concentrating on the story just a little more in this way has the effect of engrossing yourself further into the game world, setting up stronger emotional ties with the characters on screen.

Throughout the game, you're regularly presented with death, and how people react to it. It's both shocking and thought provoking whenever you come across it, whether it's bodies hanged in the woods, a battlefield littered with giant corpses, or coming across a human sacrifice in progress. Yet these themes are nicely paced out by puzzle sections, where you account for each brother's strengths and weaknesses when it comes to progressing through the environment. It actually gets pretty complex, which thankfully gives Starbreeze's title merit beyond the story.

Brothers deftly balances its narrative strengths with genuinely strong game design, then, and at three hours long we'd hope this would continue the idea of shot-form videogame stories that we saw with *Journey* last year. Not everything has to stretch to eight hours – *Brothers* is exactly the length you want it to be, showing just enough of its hand when it comes to the tale of these two siblings for it to live long in the memory.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 3 (PSN)
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox 360 (XBLA)/PC
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: 505 Games
DEVELOPER: Starbreeze Studios
PRICE: TBA
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

FAIRY TALE: *Brothers* takes place in a Brothers Grimm-infused fantasy world, with deep dark mines, trolls, giants, enormous life trees and even a marauding invisible yeti to contend with.



VERDICT 8/10
THOUGHT-PROVOKING CO-OP PLATFORMING FOR ONE



Above: Aside from the platforming, there are a few sections involving boats and flying machines that break up the action, each with their own unique play method.

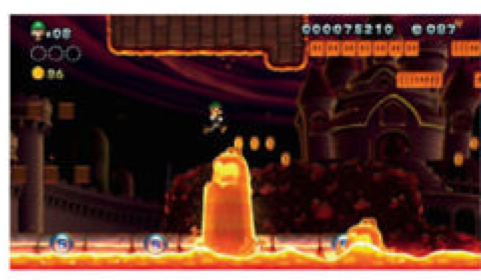
SOME BROTHERS DO 'AVE 'EM

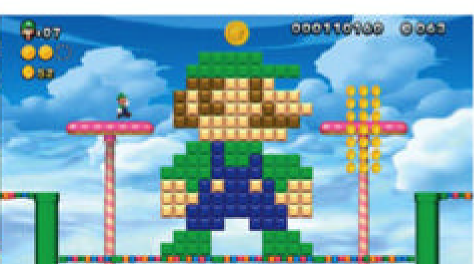
New Super Luigi U

We don't want to alarm anyone, but we think Luigi might have something wrong with him. Perhaps it's Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder from two jaunts through haunted mansions, or maybe he ate too many mushrooms in *Super Mario Bros. 2*, but the green one just doesn't seem to see the world in the same way as his little red brother.

You see, his latest adventure is a direct retread of Mario's own Wii U debut. The same map, the same level names, even the same assets. You'd think it would feel rather too familiar. But where Mario's time in this version of the Mushroom Kingdom was a fairly tender romp, Luigi's is a bloody nightmare. Where Mario saw slight inclines or small gaps, Luigi sees mountainous cliffs and giant pitfalls. And he's always in such a rush – just giving himself 100 seconds to complete every level. Perhaps if he just slowed down he'd feel better. Perhaps it's just too late.

Anyway, troubling mental condition or not, Luigi's in for a really tough ride here. While the map and level names are the same, each one of *New Super Mario Bros U*'s courses have been completely redesigned, making them shorter and much, much harder in the process. They're entirely different levels, to be clear, and designed purely to test the dexterity of experienced and brave plumber-pushers.





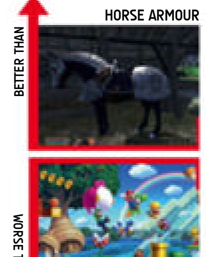
Below: Returning to the world of *New Super Mario Bros U* is a visual delight – the game is truly gorgeous, and shows just what the Wii U is capable of in the right hands. Bright, crisp and engaging.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Wii U
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £17.99
RELEASE: Out now
ONLINE REVIEWED: 1-4

BETTER THAN

HORSE ARMOUR



WORSE THAN

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS U

At their best, they're fantastic, capturing the free-running rhythm of *Mario*'s best 2D levels but upping the ante. At their worst, though, they're frustrating and irritating, exacerbated by Nintendo's curious decision to stick to a five-lives structure that means you'll have to harvest one-ups or risk losing progress if you slip up just a few times.

In a game where the difficulty is cranked up, that's a baffling choice. Also, for 18 quid, it's a fairly steep piece of DLC. There's rarely a duff level, and a few corkers in there to boot, but the feeling that you're retreading old ground is hard to ignore. In fact, it's a much better piece of DLC than most ten quid offerings on 360 and PS3, but it's still quite a high asking price for something so similar. It won't feel like that if you do slip into a Luigi-fuelled zone, though. Stack up a bunch of lives before hand, and you can fire yourself headfirst into the toughest 2D Nintendo platformer since *The Lost Levels* (which is this is nowhere near as tough as, incidentally).

When everything comes together and you conquer a seemingly impossible level with the panache and guile only a cartoon Italian plumber can muster, then it's pretty irresistible. If only Nintendo had thrown the concept of lives out of the window, then *New Super Luigi U* would be essential. As it is though, it's merely an expensive luxury. Let's hope some of that money goes towards Luigi's therapy bill.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

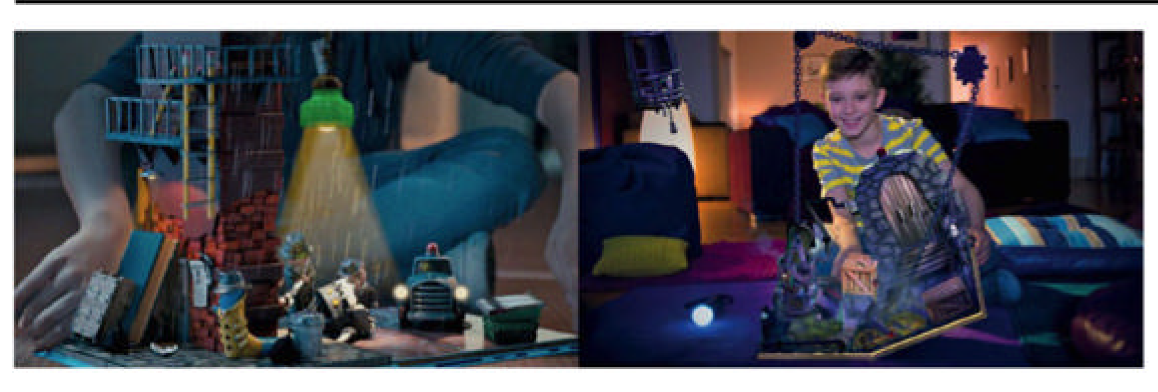
LIFE LINE: The archaic five-life structure is simply baffling for a game this hard. All it means in actuality is that you spend way too much time not actually playing the levels.

VERDICT 7/10
FAST, GREEN AND VERY HARD





Above: Luigi can jump higher than Mario, and float in the air like a moustachioed Michael Jordan. To compensate for this, he has irritatingly slippy feet – a nightmare when travelling at full speed.



Left: This game subsumes many nursery-rhyme characters into the noir theme. Humpty Dumpty is the murder victim, the Three Little Pigs are the useless coppers, and the Itsy Bitsy Spider is a drama queen who just wants to make it in show business.

EXACTLY THE KIND OF BUDGET TITLE THIS PERIPHERAL NEEDS

Wonderbook: Diggs Nightcrawler

***Diggs Nightcrawler* is more of a short story than a novel, but given its budget price it'd be unfair to expect more than the few hours of gameplay it provides, and it makes up for its brevity in character.** Where *Book Of Spells* – the only other game that is currently available for the Wonderbook – is set up like an interactive textbook, *Diggs Nightcrawler* has a strong focus on storytelling. Given that Moonbot Studios has won an Oscar for its animated short film *The Fantastic Flying Books Of Mr. Morris Lessmore*, the effort that has clearly gone into the narrative here is hardly unexpected, but is appreciable nonetheless.

This story is styled like a film noir, and the lead character – a sarcastic detective and literal bookworm called Diggs – even draws inspiration from Humphrey Bogart. As per that genre, the game features some adult themes – like shootouts and sultry dames – that might seem inconsistent with a game clearly aimed at children. However, there's no gore and though this is a murder mystery none of the nursery-rhyme characters actually die in the real sense; Humpty Dumpty does get put back together again. The story provides enough familiar themes and humour for any watching adults to appreciate, but few young players will get the subtext.

Aside from one climactic combat scene that seems out of place both in content and in difficulty, most of the game is focused on intuitive exploration and puzzle-solving. The Move controller is only needed for an optional replay after you've finished each chapter, used as a camera to collect photos from each scene. For the bulk of the game, the player simply manipulates the book and thus the 3D scenes that pop from each page. You might turn the book around to help Diggs to look around a corner for a clue, tilt a page to direct a light to shine on the area he wants to investigate, or reach out a hand to swat away one of Bo Peep's sheep. If you've got your PlayStation Eye in the right place, you shouldn't even feel too restrained as to what you can do with the book before the game gets confused and breaks the immersion.

This kind of physical manipulation of virtual worlds, which will seem magical to the young audience for which the game is designed, is what makes the Wonderbook unique. *Diggs Nightcrawler*, with its detailed 3D storybook environments and characters that directly address the player, proves what this peripheral can do if given a chance. In other words, it has managed to do what *Book Of Spells* did not, and made the Wonderbook feel like more than just a gimmick. Half a dozen more games like it, and people might actually start buying the thing.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Moonbot Studios
PRICE: £10.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

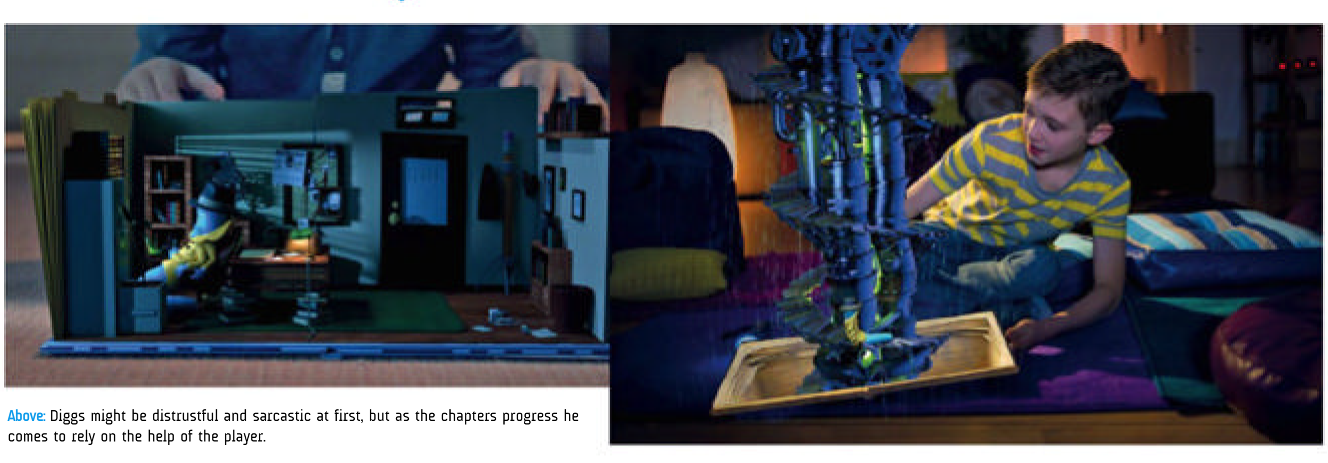


FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

NO MOVE: This is literally the only Wonderbook game that requires nothing more than the book to play, though you will need a Move controller for the initial setup.





Above: Diggs might be distrustful and sarcastic at first, but as the chapters progress he comes to rely on the help of the player.

TAKE ON THE UNDEAD WITH CLASS

State Of Decay

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Microsoft Game Studios
DEVELOPER: UndeadLabs
PRICE: 1600 Points
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN
DEAD RISING

WORSE THAN
THE WALKING DEAD

Between *Dead Island* and *The Walking Dead*, it's easier than ever to get your fix of post-apocalyptic antics, but *State Of Decay* presents perhaps the most perfect synergy of zombie slaying and group-micromanagement that we've seen replicated in the medium.

Dropped into the shoes of an unlikely survivor, you are quickly tasked with building and managing a group, as the undead bring the world as we know it into disarray. If Robert Kirkman had elected to take his franchise open world instead of episodic, it's easy to see *State Of Decay* could have been the result.

Players will need to split their time between defending a homestead, managing ties with neighbouring communities, hunting for supplies, and generally meddling with the relationships and morale of the people that have entrusted their lives to your straight shot and resourceful eye. Missions are thrown at you quickly, forcing snap decisions that are often the difference between life and death for a member of your ensemble or the acquisition of a valuable supply cache required for the survival of the entire group. Characters will go on supply runs and never return; you may leave the game for a few days only to return and find that zombies overcame your settlement's defences and created havoc in your absence. It's an addictive proposition, ensuring the survival of the human race. In a way it's easy to imagine *State Of Decay* as a warped reflection of *Animal Crossing*.



Above: Your group will need to be carefully managed, otherwise a neglected survivor can spread depression, illness or the general crazies throughout the ensemble. Infected or sick people will sometimes need to be put down...

For all of its victories, mind, *State Of Decay* is in desperate need of a polish. For what is otherwise a deeply attractive release, UndeadLabs' debut suffers from an unreliable frame-rate and frequent problems with AI behaviour. It's not enough to detract from the experience entirely but, considering its years in development, it's so disappointing to see.

And yet, outside of its many and varied technical problems, *State Of Decay* is still one of the most accomplished Xbox Live Arcade games to date, and any player with even a passing interest in testing their skills in surviving an apocalypse can't go far wrong with this release.

VERDICT 7/10
SETTING A NEW BENCHMARK FOR OPEN WORLD SURVIVAL

THE INDIE DARLING OF 2013

The Swapper

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Facepalm Games
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £9.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

AS GOOD AS
BRAID

AS GOOD AS
LIMBO

Since *Braid*, it has been difficult for independent developers to strike a balance between a reflective narrative and engaging gameplay. Usually we see development swing towards one or the other, with the experiences either just shy of greatness or drowning in plot. Facepalm Games' debut title *The Swapper* has found that balance and iterated upon it, creating an uncomfortably beautiful 2D puzzle-platformer that won't be soon forgotten.

The Swapper feels like it was developed entirely without compromise. The core mechanics only serve to strengthen its themes; a pure incarnation of narrative told through environment – and you can do it without a gun in your hand. At least, not a type of gun you've wielded before. First steps into the hull of Theseus station may be beautiful, but it's tough to stay focused while exploring a tomb in the stars. *The Swapper*'s claymation art style, fused with its grainy filter, lends the recognisably human structures an alien face. It's a clever aesthetic trick that bleeds into the underlying message; as soon as you get your hands on the titular piece of technology, the nature of consciousness itself becomes other.



Above: Despite its alien look, everything in *The Swapper* has been crafted in reality. Using a mixture of random real world objects and claymation art, the environments have been generated to fashion an easy tone throughout your time on Theseus station.

The handheld device creates duplicates of your astronaut's body, which happily move in tandem with your tender jumps and quiet footsteps through Theseus' warped corridors. While the clones mirror your every move, your consciousness can be cycled between them at will, as the cycle of killing, spawning and swapping between your clones becomes the primary method of solving puzzles.

The Swapper is brimming with intelligent game design. Lightning-fast body spawns and swaps are needed to tackle every room as you push deeper into Theseus, and it isn't long before the deceptively simple mechanics reveal a wealth of opportunity for Facepalm to really play with skill and expectation. Every death, be it a replica or your own, feels heavy. Bodies crumple, you hear the thud of them fall as you attempt to body-swap away from further personal destruction, each replica a shell, your consciousness flittering away in an attempt to survive. Blending complicated themes with compelling game design, *The Swapper* is proof that we still have space to build better indies.



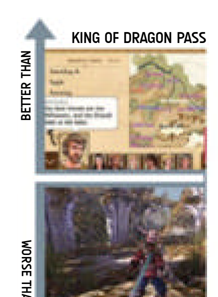
A CLASSIC ADVENTURE IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND

Sorcery!

DETAILS

FORMAT: iOS
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Inkle
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £2.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-5
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN
KING OF DRAGON PASS



WORSE THAN
HORN

Before the Game Boy rejuvenated long car journeys and sleepless summer nights, generations of kids in the Eighties surrendered their attention to the time sink of Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone's *Fighting Fantasy* books. Jackson's four-part *Sorcery!* tale introduces deeper mechanics into the standard choose-your-own-adventure model, letting players take on the role of a sorcerer or a warrior, changing the way a player could approach the entire story.

The first part of the saga, *The Shamutanti Hills*, has made the jump to iOS, powered by Inkle's Inklewriter tech, and fans of the printed word will undoubtedly be enamoured with the release. Inkle has successfully weaved simple game mechanics together with a timeless fantasy prose, recreating the quest for the Crown Of Kings in the most accessible way possible.

This interpretation of Jackson's original works opens the world up to players far more than the restrictions of straight prose ever could. Players are free to travel more paths than ever before, with the game responding on the fly to the thousands of player choices on hand. Each move you make feels like it has an impact on the adventure, with many of the routes across the gorgeous map and branching story options procedurally generated to continue the challenge through long grass, dark caves and small towns.

Players no longer have to choose between sorcerer and warrior at the outset, they now have access to both weaponry and 48 three-letter spells to cast. The battles themselves play out like an intricate game of rock-paper-scissors, with your character having to jump between attack and defence, using the procedurally-generated text to inform the power of your strikes. It's a cautious dance, and you're never more than a misstep away from death.

Simply said, *Sorcery!* is a wonderful release that should light a fire in the heart of any fan of an era long-gone; this is a welcome addition to any iOS library.

VERDICT 8/10
A RICH REVIVAL OF A WORTHY CLASSIC

Below: Having 48 three-letter spells is a nice addition, but its simply too much to remember and execute; the magic will be a feature many abandon all together.



NINTENDO ACHIEVES THE IMPOSSIBLE AND CREATES A BLAND WARIOWARE

Game & Wario



DETAILS

FORMAT: Wii U
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo SPD/Intelligent Systems
PRICE: £29.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-5
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

JUST LIKE
WARIOWARE: SNAPPED!



WORSE THAN
WARIOWARE TOUCHED!

***Game & Wario* was initially conceived as a tech demo of games that would be preinstalled on each Wii U.** It's a shame Nintendo didn't stick with this original idea, as the end product is rather barebones.

The original *WarioWare* titles were a gleeful selection of insane mini-games, as nutty as they were inventive. While *Game & Wario* shows signs of the flashes of genius found in those earlier entries, it never manages to truly impress; leaving you with a surprising number of games that you simply won't bother with once you've unlocked them. The fast-paced five-second gameplay of past *Wario* games is all but ignored, with Nintendo focusing on traditional mini-games that will show off its new system.

For the most part, many do a good job of doing just that, particularly Taxi, which sees you bombing around the countryside rescuing farm animals from an alien invasion. Other enjoyable games include the multiplayer games Fruit and Islands, and the single player offerings of Design and Shutter. Fruit sees you stealing fruit (using the Game Pad) under the watchful eyes of your opponents, while Islands has you flinging Fronks onto a floating points board. Design on the other hand has you drawing lines, circles and other shapes of specific lengths to create a robot, while Shutter sees you using the Game Pad as a camera, scanning your TV for specific people to impress your editor with.

And then there's the brilliant Gamer, the closest *Game & Wario* gets to emulating the success of earlier games in the series. Controlling 9-Volt you play a selection of typical *WarioWare* games while keeping a watchful eye out for your mum who thinks you're sleeping. It's a great concept and surprisingly scary, with you constantly flicking from the Game Pad to the TV screen, but it also reminds you that so few of the other games have as much imagination.

And for us that's *Game & Wario*'s biggest problem, it's enjoyable enough, but is well below the standards we've come to expect from Nintendo's inventive, silly franchise.



VERDICT 6/10
WELL BELOW WARIO'S USUAL STANDARDS



WHY I ❤...

Nights Into Dreams

LEANNE BAYLEY, CREATIVE PRODUCER, REMODE STUDIOS

"I'm often asked what my favourite game of all time is, and without hesitation I always answer, Nights Into Dreams, *for the Sega Saturn.* Nights *is the first game I fell in love with. The world was the most vibrant and fantastical place I had ever visited, its inhabitants unique, the music echoed the feelings of each environment and the fluidity of movement was something new. Everything melted together so perfectly and was such a mesmerising experience.*

Although it wasn't the free-roaming 3D game we take for granted today, at the time the illusion of freedom was so compelling. The dream of free flight is such a universal desire and Nights *gave us this. It was acrobatic, graceful and you were in total control of it. Above all what I love about this game is that it is pure fun."*



> "Although it wasn't the free-roaming 3D game we take for granted today, at the time the illusion of freedom was so compelling"
>
> **LEANNE BAYLEY, REMODE STUDIOS**

RETRO

NO.137 JULY 2013



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BEHIND THE SCENES

JUNGLE STRIKE



20 years ago, Electronic Arts released a sequel to one of its most iconic 16-bit games. The premise was 'bigger, better, more', and it delivered in spades. games™ dons its flight suit and takes the Comanche for a spin with Jungle Strike designers John Manley and Tony Barnes…



Released: 1993
Format: Mega Drive, Super Nintendo, DOS, Amiga, Game Boy, Game Gear
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: High Score Productions with Mike Posehn

KEY STAFF:
John Manley & Tony Barnes (lead design and associate producers)
Mike Posehn (programmer)
Scott Berfield (producer)
Tim Calvin & Mike Shirley (3D models and animation)
Julie Cressa (art director)
Brian Schmidt (music and sound)

WHEN FREE-ROAMING helicopter shooter *Desert Strike* became Electronic Arts' biggest non-sports hit in 1992, thoughts inevitably turned to a sequel. The core team would remain the same: on the technical side, Mike Posehn handled programming and engine refinements with Tim Calvin once more contributing the excellent 3D models. Meanwhile, John Manley would continue to be the driving force for the budding franchise, acting as lead director and designer, encompassing mission design, storyline and the implementation of new features; assisting him again was Tony Barnes. *Jungle Strike* was cleared for take-off. "Actually, even early in the development of *Desert Strike*, we considered that there might be a sequel," begins Manley, "and when it came to designing, we wanted to take what players liked about it and give them a wider variety of locations, missions and vehicles." Barnes adds: "It was important to outdo *Desert Strike*, solidify the game as a franchise and not just a one-off. We also wanted to make sure that we gave the fans a worthy sequel and not just a green version of the first game."

Despite the team's ambitions, the basic template for *Jungle Strike* would remain similar. The player would pilot a Comanche helicopter with the controls again in first-person despite the third-person view, something Posehn himself had originally felt was essential to the physics and 'feel' of the game. With the programmer busy tweaking the engine, Manley and Barnes began to design the game's many mission and locations, as the former explains. "The way we created our levels was to print out large maps of the terrain for each one and then populate the world with individual pieces of paper that contained isometric images of buildings, roads, tanks, guard towers and so on. Then we would transcribe the X and Y co-ordinates for each object by hand into the level data."

A LOT OF OUR INSPIRATION CAME FROM OUR LOVE OF ACTION MOVIES

As anyone who has played the game will have realised, there was a heavy Hollywood influence at play in *Jungle Strike*, even at this early point. "A lot



Each mission began with a briefing from operations.


Destroying Washington's IRS building gained a cool 400,000 point bonus.

JUNGLE STRIKE: IN THE KNOW

■ John Manley was originally a member of a production group developing a PC flight simulation. When EA began supporting the Genesis instead, an early prototype was quickly re-tooled into what would become *Desert Strike*.

■ The enemy HARV units were a nod to a similar vehicle from the movie *Stripes*.

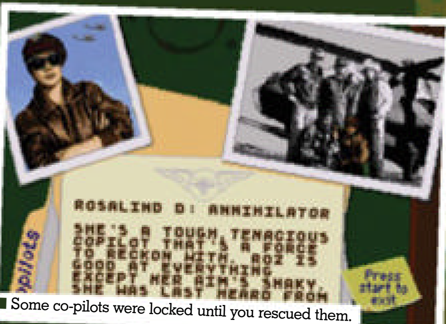
■ On a related note, the blue VW buses from the Washington DC level were inspired by *Back To The Future*.

■ While each square foot represented approximately 1.5 miles, that space contained the equivalent of ten square miles of 'real-life' targets, so there was always something to do around every corner.

■ Destroying the IRS building in either of the Washington levels netted you 400,000 bonus points.

■ All the co-pilots and characters in the cinematics were EA employees. For example, Manley played the captain with his feet on the desk, while Barnes portrayed the commander in the war room.

■ Manley's involvement in the series would eventually lead to him being dubbed the 'Godfather of Strike.'



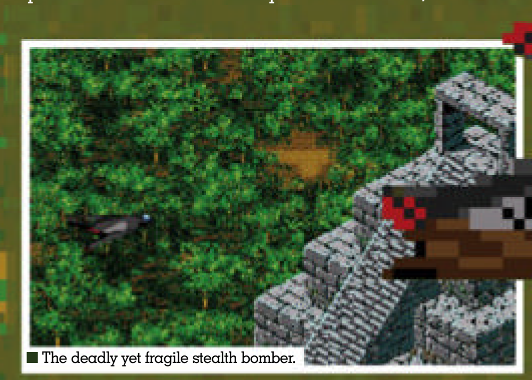
Some co-pilots were locked until you rescued them.

of our inspiration for level designs came from our love of action movies and wanting to deliver that edge-of-your-seat excitement," confirms Manley, "so things such as a night mission, where you needed to watch for the glow of an enemy's night vision goggles while navigating with the muzzle flash of your missiles, just added to that excitement."

■■■ Another crucial addition was the inclusion of more controllable vehicles. "We knew from the beginning that multiple vehicles would be one of the major enhancements for the *Strike* series," notes Manley, "as there were so many other cool military vehicles in our fiction that we wanted to give players the chance to operate." Barnes recalls a technical reticence to this aspect. "We were dubious that they could all be implemented, as each vehicle had to be 3D modelled, rendered out, converted to 16-colour sprites and then cleaned up." Nevertheless, the supplementary vehicles added greatly to the game, despite reservations from the designers. "I think the motorcycle was the hardest to get right, as it was initially too small to see on the road," winces Manley before Barnes singles out the stealth bomber: "Landing that thing was a huge pain in the ass!" he laughs.

Fortunately, one of the main tenets that Posehn had for the project was to create reusable systems: when it came to operating the stealth bomber, as its Z-axis operated on a similar level to ICBM missiles and parachuting soldiers, Posehn was able to create a root code for covering all three. This, and other tricks, proved crucial as development proceeded. "I actually really liked the F-117 Bomber," admits Manley, "as it did give us a whole new gameplay mechanic: the precision targeting of your projectiles while piloting a constantly moving craft." And while Barnes' frustration with the landing procedure is understandable, Manley admires the skill required to line up the bomber correctly. "It was something the player had to master; when the game took control and it went into its automatic landing sequence, you knew you could exhale with relief!" Other alternate vehicles, such as a military truck laden with explosives, were considered and abandoned as the team attempted to streamline the levels.

With essential tuning to the physics and controls also required thanks to the added vehicles, *Jungle Strike* was already looking like a tight fit for the Mega Drive's then-standard 8MB cartridge. When Manley and Barnes began blueprinting the many levels, the team asked


The deadly yet fragile stealth bomber.



The mission map was hugely vital in navigating your way around each level.

Electronic Arts' marketing and sales department for an upgrade to the 16MB cartridge. "We wanted to deliver a richer experience," says Manley, "so having twice the memory allowed us to produce better gameplay, graphics and more complex objects, while maintaining the level of quality in sound effects, music and cinematics."

Driving the level design was a responsibility to which Manley retains much of the credit – although once an outline had been sketched, the whole team collaborated on each scenario and the plot twists that they would encompass. And while it wasn't planned, it soon became clear that connecting the story to *Desert Strike* would make good sense if the series was to be seen as a franchise rather than individual games. "Manley was always the 'plot guy' while I am more mechanics-based," remarks Barnes, "so it was a perfect marriage. He could take the smallest of nuggets and turn it into the most amazing idea, and it would still be implementable." Nevertheless, one idea which didn't make it into the game was finally being able to control yourself, the pilot. "While working on the game one night, EA's chief creative officer said to me 'Hey kid, save it for the sequel!'" recalls Barnes, a mantra that has stayed with him since. The 'little man', as the character was known, eventually debuted in the third chapter, *Urban Strike*.

The *Jungle Strike* team still had numerous issues to work around, not least translating their paper-based transcriptions into exact co-ordinates for the game's engine to interpret. "Undoubtedly the hardest part of the job was capturing the exact X and Y co-ordinates of each object in the game from our paper maps," says Manley, "and it was especially difficult to plot the paths of our moving objects." To help solve this, he and Barnes created a clear acetate grid that was placed over each tile of the paper world; one of them would call out the locations of every item while the other typed in the co-ordinates. It was still a time-consuming task – for the next sequel, Posehn created a tool called Dynaflow, which made the process of creating and programming the levels and vehicle paths considerably easier.

YET THE TWO biggest obstacles to *Jungle Strike*'s development, time and space, remained until the very end. Barnes recalls the latter: "We

WHAT THEY SAID...

This game is arguably the best Mega Drive shoot 'em up ever seen – and who am I to argue?

Mean Machines Sega, Lucy Hickman, May 1993

"MORE FUN [THAN] SHARING A SLEEPING BAG WITH CINDY CRAWFORD"

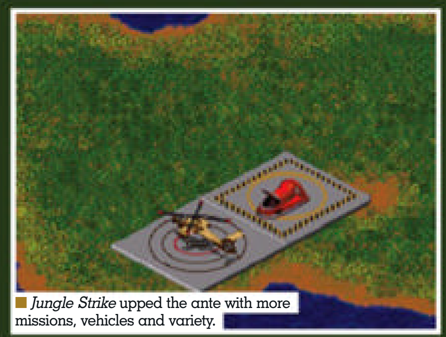
Mean Machines Sega's editor Julian Rignall recalls his praise for Jungle Strike

"I WAS A HUGE fan of *Desert Strike*, and couldn't wait to get my hands on the sequel," remembers Julian Rignall, editor of *Mean Machines Sega*, "So when the first build arrived at our offices it was a major event." The game scored 96% in the magazine's May '93 issue – does Julian feel they were a bit, well, over the top? "No, not at all. The review scores reflected the excitement and enthusiasm we had for a game. It's easy to get sniffy and compare the relative merits of scores and games years after, but the bottom line was that that game was some seriously hot shit, and we loved it!" he laughs. "Plus, the fact we're talking about it 20 years later is a testament to the game, one of the Mega Drive's finest." Rignall also defends one notorious extract from the review that stated: "Things don't get much more fun this side of sharing a sleeping bag with Cindy Crawford." "Ha, yeah I remember that," beams Julian, "but we thought that humour and creativity were hugely important. It was all about getting across our excitement while also being entertaining."

> A GAMING EVOLUTION

Desert Strike > Jungle Strike > Urban Strike


Desert Strike set the template and innovative controls in a Middle-Eastern backdrop.


Jungle Strike upped the ante with more missions, vehicles and variety.


The prescient *Urban Strike* featured a terrorist attack on New York, as well as on-foot missions.

were down to the wire and about 30 bits over the cart's capacity. I had gone through every tile I could eliminate, every piece of game code I could optimise, and there was nothing else I could do. Finally, our technical director told me the animation that played on boot up was taking up space." After extensive lobbying of Electronic Arts executives, the spinning EA logo at the start of *Jungle Strike* was replaced with a simple fade in and out to enable the game to ship. "It was done right as we had to go gold, so we were sweating bullets on that one!" adds Barnes. And like most videogame development, time was a constant pressure, as Manley describes: "I remember working 36 hours straight to get a solid build to take to the CES show in Las Vegas. After this marathon debugging session with Tony and Mike, I left work, boarded a plane, walked up to our product manager at the EA booth in Vegas and handed him the oversized gold Genesis development cartridge before checking into my hotel." Unsurprisingly, Manley collapsed in his bed and was not seen again for several hours.

Upon release, *Jungle Strike* received almost unanimous praise, with only minor dissension concerning its difficulty and supposed jingoism. "I don't think we treated the subject any differently to other popular media of the time," comments Manley, "and our depiction of the villains in *Jungle Strike* was in line with how Hollywood portrayed them, such as the drug lord in *Clear And Present Danger* or *Die Hard 2*'s rogue dictator." Nevertheless,

WE WERE DOWN TO THE WIRE AND ABOUT 30 BITS OVER THE CART'S CAPACITY

with acclaim for the game greatly outweighing these criticisms, we ask Manley and Barnes why they think *Jungle Strike* was such a hit with reviewers and gamers. "I think one of the things that made it so successful was the freedom to go anywhere in the world and choose you own way to complete the missions" says Manley, and Barnes nods in agreement. "Most games back then shoved you down one path." He says. "And that's not what Manley and I wanted. We wanted people to feel empowered and not simply execute memorised patterns." Without doubt another facet of *Jungle Strike*'s success was the fine tuning and optimisation of each level, as well as the sharp control of the vehicles. "Like *Desert Strike*, without the responsiveness of the chopper," notes Barnes pointedly, "the game would have been dead in the water."

Jungle Strike was destined to become another huge hit for Electronic Arts. Boasting sandbox-style gameplay (when it was relatively uncommon on consoles), varied missions and a neat mix of action and humour, there's no doubt as to Manley and Barnes' pride looking back at the game today. "What I like most is how we pushed the boundaries of what could be done with tile-based graphics in terms of gameplay and storytelling – and how we were able to seamlessly merge these together." says Manley.

Barnes credits the game with taking his career significantly upward as he became more involved with game direction and franchise-building. "And my favourite thing in life is not the fast cars, mansions or parties in Vegas," he grins mischievously, "but meeting people who have played the games I have worked on and hearing them say 'I loved that game!' I get that an awful lot with *Jungle Strike* especially, and that makes it all worth it."

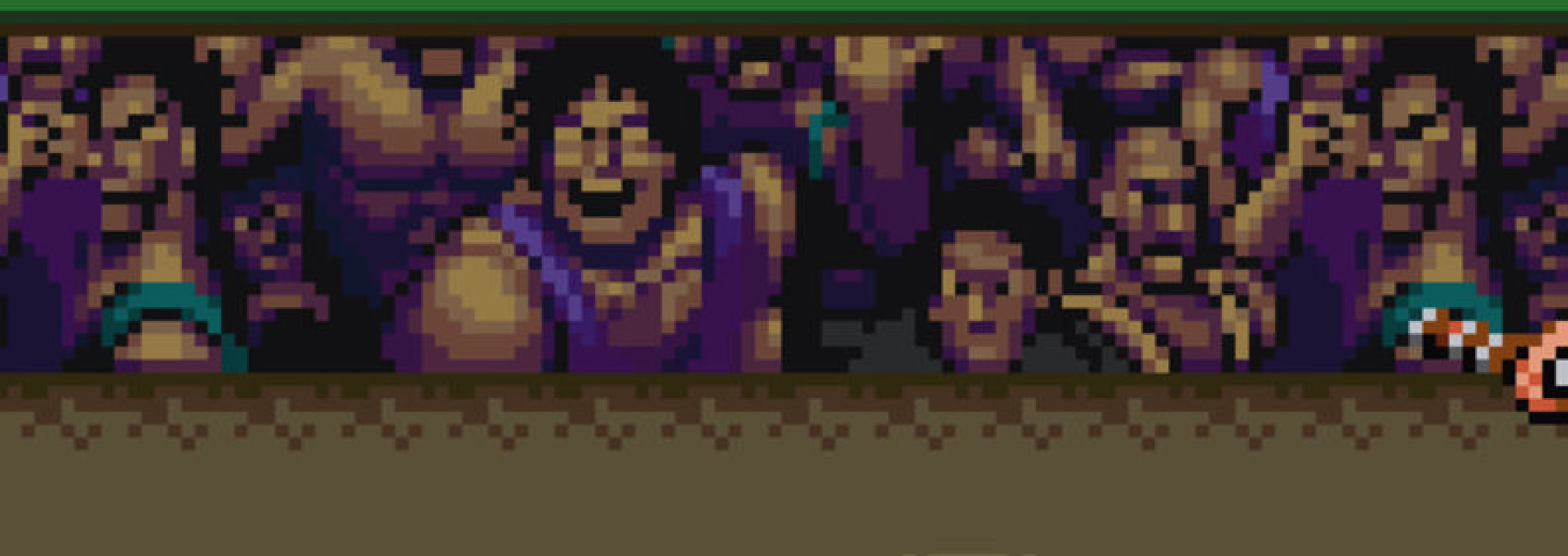
Our special thanks to John Manley, Tony Barnes and Mike Posehn.


Taking off outside the White House.

BEST BOSS

FINAL FIGHT SNES [Capcom] **1992**

■ WHETHER YOU know him by Sodom or Katana, this wrestling champ simmering among Metro City's clandestine fighting scene is one tough cookie. While he's oft-ridiculed across his various *Street Fighter Alpha* appearances – his debut in *Final Fight* is no laughing matter. With a torrent of lightning-fast attacks that deal massive damage, dropping invincible rush attacks from one side of the ring to the other, it takes the entire range of your hero's pugilistic prowess to overcome this faux-samurai fighter. His original appearance is notable due to the brawl's intense difficulty, but time has been unkind to the once undefeated champion. In truth, his failure in the ring was merely the beginning of the once-great ruler's tragic descent into ignominy.









RETRO INTERVIEW

SPYRO'S CREATOR

We speak to the artist behind Spyro The Dragon and Crash Bandicoot, two of gaming's best-known icons…

Few artists involved in videogames can claim to rival the achievements of Charles Zembillas. While his work in videogames rarely went beyond working with Insomniac Games and Naughty Dog, Charles was the designer behind two of gaming's most iconic creations – Spyro the Dragon and Crash Bandicoot. These two Playstation mascots defined a generation, and gave it a face, look and attitude. Though they have been arguably watered down and used in a less than fan-friendly fashion over the past decade, Charles' love and appreciation for them remains strong, as does his hope for them in the future. games™ chats to Charles about Spyro, Crash, his vision and approach to his art, how he thinks his two most memorable characters have evolved over the years without his involvement, and we ask him the most controversial question of all – who does he prefer, Spyro or Crash?

Charles Zembillas, give us an insight into your early life.
I was born and raised in Gary, Indiana, a steel town that's part of the Chicago metropolitan area. My father immigrated from Greece as a teenager and my mother's parents as well. I started working at a very young age in our family business which was a little neighbourhood grocery store. One of the things I used to do was take white butcher's paper and make signs for the front windows featuring characters I'd create. They were popular and brought customers in plus it helped make life more cheerful for everyone. Gary is a rugged town and I learned a lot growing up there. I was encouraged early on to continue with my art as I showed promise. I was taught that artistic talent is a gift from God so I took it seriously and followed this path.

Before creating those characters for the front of the grocery store, what initially got you into the arts?
I decided to become an artist while in fourth grade. We had drawing time in class at a new school I was attending. I was sketching the Lone Ranger and Tonto with crayons and a girl sitting behind me saw what I was doing. She exclaimed how good it was so loud that everyone in the class rushed around me to see it. Later that day at home, I told my mother I was going to be an artist when I grew up.

Prior to that I saw Walt Disney's *Pinocchio*. In those days there were no video devices, just TV and the movies so this was a very special event. *Pinocchio* profoundly influenced me. Also as I grew I was inspired by the great masters of the Renaissance and Saturday morning cartoons, comic books, so on. Everything came together to make me the artist that I became. I studied at the American Academy of Art in Chicago and was hired by Hallmark Cards. At Hallmark I was surrounded by brilliant artists. When I got into animation I was inspired by many great talents.

I HAD A LOT OF CONFIDENCE THAT I COULD GIVE INSOMNIAC WHAT THEY WERE LOOKING FOR



DEVELOPER COMMENTS

"■■■ Jason, Mark and I had this idea in our heads for Crash which was of the 'We'll know it when we see it' sort. Charles is a very fast sketch artist, with a real knack for capturing cartoon emotion. So he quickly drew a whole bunch of versions of this cartoon rodent guy. They were all fun, but the one that became Crash just had more emotion and better fit the technical limits. For example, the face needed to be big and unobstructed so it would read at a low polygon count. Once we had the basic shape, Charles nailed the goofy and a little bit dumb, with a touch of wily and a good dose of determined. He drew 20-30 different emotion poses like bored, frustrated, dejected, quizzical, etc. We selected the pallet of ones that fit Crash. Voila. I still have those sketches on my wall."

ANDREW GAVIN, CO-FOUNDER OF NAUGHTY DOG, ON CRASH'S CREATION


It wasn't just the novelty of the characters – technically, the games were standard-setting.

Crash's wider cast of characters were partly inspired by Nineties Warner cartoons.

Spyro and Crash gave Sony two platform icons at once, yet it never owned either character, sadly.

While an artist method can't be nailed down in a few words, how do you approach your work in general?
It all depends on the project. Either based on direction I receive or how much freedom I have to explore or what's needed for production. I strive for originality in everything I do. I'd say that's the most significant aspect of how I approach my work along with quality in all I do.

In the Eighties you worked as a character designer on classic cartoons such as *He-Man And The Masters Of The Universe*, *Ghostbusters* and *Bravestarr*. Tell us about your work on them, and did you realise when working on them that they'd be as highly revered as they are now?
Not at all. I did minimal work on Filmation's *Ghosbusters*. Most of what I was involved with back then was *He-Man*, *She-Ra* and *Bravestarr*. When I started on *He-Man* I thought the show was going to be a flop. I didn't think people would get into it. Learned a big lesson and have since kept an open mind about what audiences go for.

The leap from the likes of *He-Man* and *She-ra* to videogames is pretty random. How did you break into the videogames industry?
I got in to the videogame industry by chance thanks to Joe Pearson. In late 1994, he was contacted through connections at Universal Studios about getting involved with a new videogame that was going to be developed. He was busy at the time and passed the project on to me. Soon after he was free again and decided to get back into it and things progressed from there. We both worked on the project and it became *Crash Bandicoot*. In those days videogames were not taken seriously on an artistic level. This was the first project where a conscientious effort would be made to design a game project on a new level of professionalism.

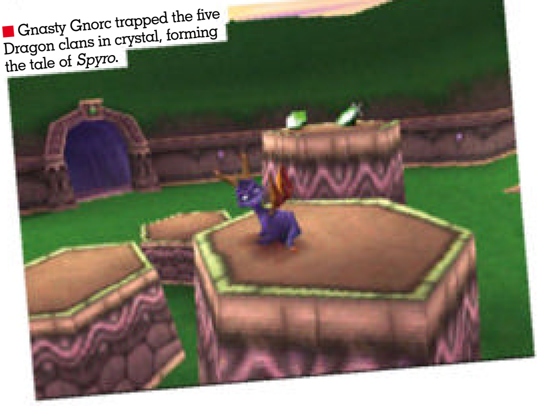
Your work in animation continued throughout the Eighties and well into the Nineties. What influence did this have on your videogame work?
I had to adapt my work to the production specs of videogames. At the beginning I designed for a simple 500 polygon format for *Crash* and *Spyro* on PlayStation. When PlayStation 2 came out the polygon count was increased by 20 times the resolution so I changed my approach on *Jak And Daxter*. Instead of thinking simple flat graphics it changed to include the thickness of design elements. Showing the girth of things became a consideration. My art has adapted since then and I find myself designing with more dimensionality in mind than before. These considerations were not necessarily needed for traditional animation production. Videogame work required an approach based upon a new dynamic.

Back in 1996 you worked on your first videogame, Crash Bandicoot, which was developed by Naughty Dog. How did you approach the character of Crash?
[I] worked very closely with Naughty Dog. My primary concern was coming up with something they would be happy with given what they were aiming for. Joe Pearson was even more involved than I was and tuned into their direction. I explored alternative possibilities. They liked Joe's interpretation of the character and from then on it became a matter of making a rough concept sketch work for animation and also to develop a personality. My biggest contribution to *Crash* was to make design sense of the character and bring him to life. The process happened fairly quickly. It didn't take long to define Willy the Wombat as he was called at the time.

DEVELOPER COMMENTS

"It was great working with Charles so many years ago to come up with the initial design for the Spyro character. Charles sketched what must have been over 100 variations of Spyro. Spyro started off older and a bit angry-looking. But as we continued to brainstorm he got younger and cuter until Charles delivered the final visual design we used for the game character. Charles also did a fantastic job sketching out variations on the different dragon families. Charles is a truly talented artist and we all feel fortunate to have collaborated with him during those early Spyro days."

TED PRICE, FOUNDER OF INSOMNIAC GAMES, ON SPYRO'S CREATION

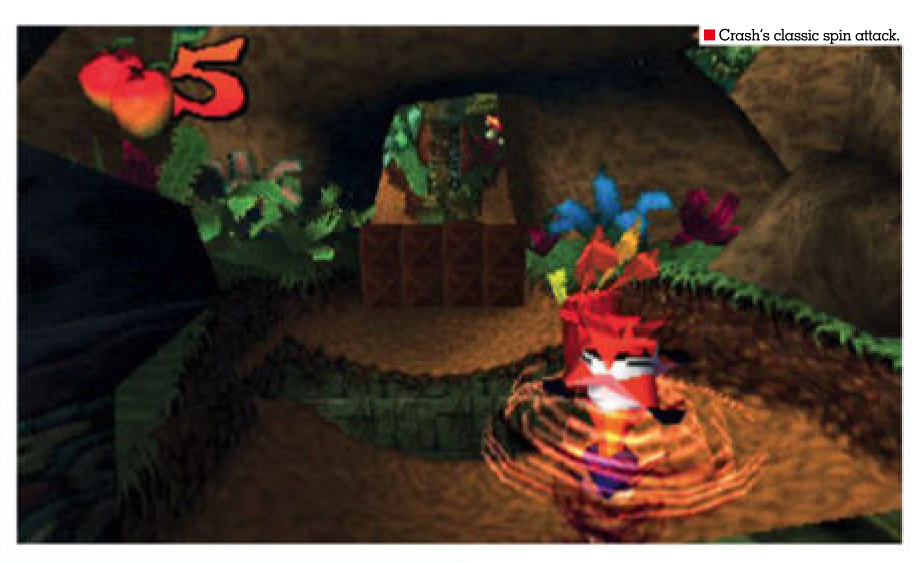

Gnasty Gnorc trapped the five Dragon clans in crystal, forming the tale of *Spyro*.

***Crash Bandicoot* was met with universal acclaim, and Crash himself quickly became somewhat of an unofficial mascot of the PlayStation. How does it feel to be the designer of such a beloved character?**
It's a great feeling! Very satisfying. I'm glad it turned out well and that the games were as popular as they became. Imagine watching TV with your family and friends and seeing a commercial air featuring a major character you developed. Or stopping at McDonald's and seeing Happy Meals with your characters. It's something very special.

You repeated this success once again with your work on designing Spyro for the *Spyro The Dragon* series by Insomniac Games, starting in 1998. Did your approach to Spyro differ to the way you designed Crash?
I had a lot of confidence that I could give Insomniac what they were looking for. I had a great degree of freedom with Spyro compared to Crash. Spyro happened very quickly. By the second day of work I nailed his design.

While it's probably like choosing a favourite child, if you had to choose between Crash and Spyro, which do you prefer and why? Don't worry, we'll protect you from any fan blacklash.
Tough choice. I like both characters and feel a strong affinity to each one. If I had to choose I'd say Spyro. Reason being is he was a pure effort. There wasn't a back and forth between designers or heavy art direction. Once Insomniac decided which way to go with the character I was able to come up with Spyro without having to incorporate someone else's interpretation. A very smooth and almost effortless experience. Very positive.

Since Naughty Dog and Insomniac Games have left both of these series behind them, fans have arguably noticed a steady decline in quality, both in terms of game design as well as art design. As the artist who designed both characters, which character do you feel has suffered over the years due to mishandling?
I believe fans know best as to what they want with Crash. I think the post-Naughty Dog developers and publishers should have been more sensitive to the fan base. I'm open to the evolution of a character and a franchise but there seems to be widespread discontent over the direction that Crash went based upon fan feedback.



Crash's classic spin attack.

IMAGINE SEEING A COMMERCIAL AIR FEATURING A CHARACTER YOU DEVELOPED… IT'S VERY SPECIAL

Because of the decline in quality of both series, fans are absolutely crying out for a return to form for both *Crash* and *Spyro*. If asked, would you consider returning to both franchises?
Yes, of course. I enjoyed working on both projects and would welcome an opportunity to get involved again if it presented itself.

If you had to chose one truly great videogame character design in recent years, what would it be?
Since the days of *Jak And Daxter* there really haven't been distinctive videogame characters that come to mind in the tradition of character animation. Most of what I've aware of tends to be realistic or hyper realistic properties. I'm partial to exaggerated characters in the classic animation style. I think there are some interesting things happening with *Skylanders*. I like what I'm seeing with Sony's *Knack*. An appealing style to the characters and the game design overall.

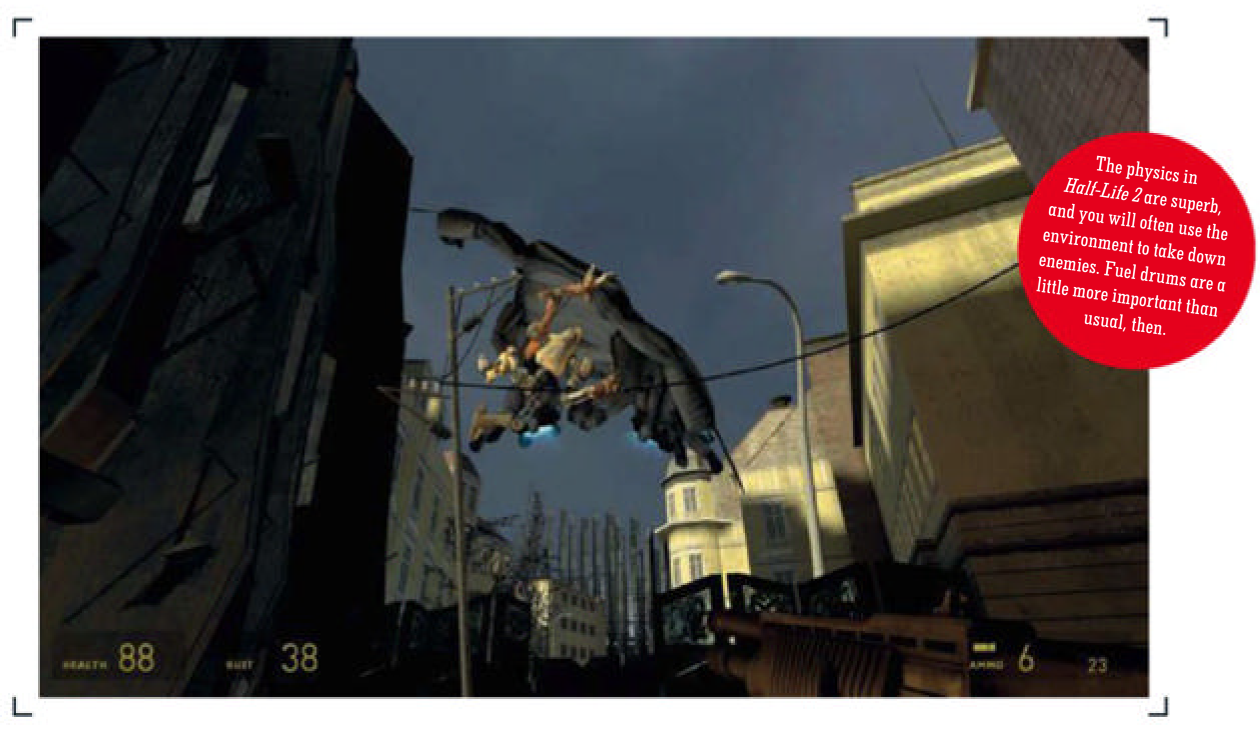
Since the days of *He-Man And The Masters Of The Universe*, *She-Ra*, *Bravestarr* and not to mention your videogame, how has your creative process changed?
Well, I don't have to copy or adapt to someone else's style any longer. I have much more freedom to explore new looks. I do concept development now as opposed to production art. I'd say the biggest difference is that I feel that I'm a better artist today than I was back then. I've learned a lot and have a greater understanding of things and a broader frame of reference.

Tell us about your current work in The Animation Academy.
The Animation Academy has been a great experience. I enjoy teaching and I've had a great deal of vicarious success through my students. The school started in the back of a restaurant in 1998 with almost no capital investment and it went on to greatly influence the animation industry. The design crews of both Naughty Dog and Insomniac Games studied at the Academy. Many great artists have. The direction I'd like to take the school at this point is in the development and publication of new character based projects. It was always my intention to have the school function as a source of original content for new intellectual properties. I've got some projects on the way that I'm excited about. I intend on crowdfunding the Academy in the near future to raise funds for these projects and to position the school and its program for expansion. Hopefully we'll be as successful with this as we have been with changing the lives of talented artists for the better. 

GAME CHANGERS

HALF-LIFE 2

Released: 2004 **Publisher:** Valve **System:** PC



The physics in *Half-Life 2* are superb, and you will often use the environment to take down enemies. Fuel drums are a little more important than usual, then.

Every month **games™** looks back at some of the most influential videogames of all time. This month we see how Valve's revolutionary sequel to Half-Life helped shape the future of first-person shooters

WHEN VALVE ANNOUNCED a sequel to its hit shooter *Half-Life* at E3 in May 2003, the gaming world predictably went nuts. In addition to impressing with an amazing new game engine called Source, Valve was revealing a sequel to one of the most important first-person shooters of all time. Expectations seemed to be impossibly high, but once Valve's magnum opus was released some 18 months later, it not only met the lofty hopes of gamers everywhere, but smashed them with yet another landmark videogame.

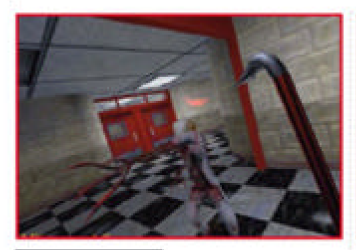
Valve had once again set a new standard for the popular genre, a standard which is still being felt in today's games. *BioShock Infinite*, *Homefront*, *Resistance 3* and *Dishonored* are just a few of the titles to share DNA with Valve's impressive sequel, and developers continue to cite *Half-Life 2* and its own groundbreaking predecessor as essential when it comes to implementing narrative into games. This stylish storytelling technique is rampant in *Half-Life 2*, and has done so well that it's not even necessary to have played the original game. Subtle narration fills you in on all the key points of the original, so a player can be as disorientated as protagonist Gordon Freeman when he first makes his appearance and still know what's going on.

Some might say that Valve had it easy because it was essentially building on the groundwork it had lain down with the excellent *Half-Life*. That's not really fair, however. Valve isn't the sort of company to rest on its laurels, and it pushed every aspect of the original game to deliver a title that, nearly a decade on, still manages to enthral those who play it.

This in part is down to the Source engine itself, a highly polished piece of coding that's still heavily in use today. There's a cleanness and slickness to Valve's engine that is consistently impressive, regardless of how it has to scale. Valve even managed a perfectly solid port on the original Xbox, admittedly with lengthy loading times and an

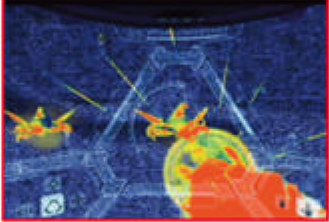
HALF-LIFE 2: BEFORE AND AFTER

THE GAMES THAT SHARE DNA WITH VALVE'S HIT GAME



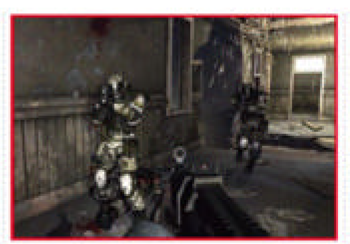
HALF-LIFE

★ Valve's industry-defining shoot-'em-up was a world away from the likes of *Doom* and *Quake*, providing gamers with more than just enemies to shoot at. It introduced many key game mechanics to the genre and proved you didn't need expansive cut-scenes to tell an incredibly polished story.



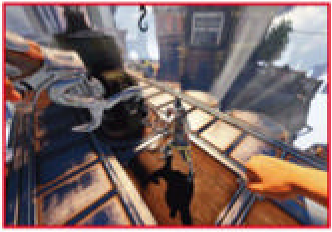
METROID PRIME

★ Although *Metroid Prime* has plenty of guns in it, like *Half-Life 2* it was anything but a conventional shooter. Its greatest achievement was converting the 2D essence of the *Metroid* series to the third dimension, but its beautifully detailed environments are what really link it to Valve's shooter.



F.E.A.R.

★ Like *Half-Life 2*, Monolith's *F.E.A.R.* proved that it was possible to make survival-based horror and wrap it around a first-person shooter. It takes the concept further than Valve did, but remembers that it's atmosphere and not just gory shocks that should drive a story forward.



BIOSHOCK INFINITE

★ *BioShock* builds on both *Half-Life 2* and the likes of *System Shock 2* by delivering believable characters and an achingly gorgeous world. It's arguably one of the greatest modern day examples of story narration, and features brilliant AI in the form of Elizabeth, the girl you have to rescue.

occasionally erratic frame rate. Revisit *Half-Life 2* today, and it remains a spectacularly good-looking game, and while its textures might not be as detailed as more recent games (there's nearly a decade's gulf in technology after all), it's surprising how good it still looks. It's most notable in the lighting (which was substantially improved in *Half-Life 2*'s two episodic sequels) and the many characters you meet, including Alyx; one of the most realistic and believable characters we've ever encountered in a videogame.

THE MOST STUNNING aspect of *Half-Life 2*, however, is how realistic everything felt. This in part was due to the dynamic lighting, but the environments were also stunning pieces of work that felt utterly believable as you explored them. There are no pointless dead ends in *Half-Life 2*, invisible walls are largely absent (Valve simply blocks off areas it doesn't want you to go with suitable objects) and every building you go into appears to have a distinct purpose. Every single inch of the game world, styled on a dystopian Eastern Europe, feels completely real as if it's a place from a long forgotten time that members of Valve has visited. It's alien but also recognisable, and you can't help but want to explore every bit of it. Exploring does highlight

HALF-LIFE 2 IS AS MUCH ABOUT THE ADVENTURE AS SHOOTING ENEMIES

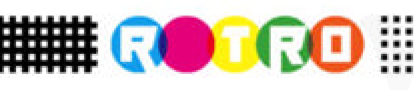
KEY FACTS

- *Half-Life 2* was built using Valve's Source Engine. The adaptable engine made its debut with *Counter-Strike: Source* and has been used in every Valve game since.
- Alyx Vance is voiced by Merle Dandridge, a theatre performer in *Spamalot* and *Rent*. If her voice sounds familiar you've probably heard it in the excellent *The Last Of Us* as Marlene.
- Valve was involved in a legal battle with Vivendi Universal over the distribution rights of *Half-Life 2* in cyber cafes. A settlement was agreed with Vivendi losing the right to distribute Valve's games.

the fact that *Half-Life 2* is actually very linear, but as with the best games, it cleverly tricks you into thinking the opposite, and that you're instead inside an epic believable world and not just traipsing down predetermined corridors.

This bait and switch continues with the excellent gameplay, which continues to play with conventions. On the surface it appears to be a straightforward first-person shooter, but in reality it's so much more. Like its predecessor, *Half-Life 2* is as much about the adventure as it is about shooting down enemies, and while it has a variety of satisfying weaponry (most notably the game-changing Gravity Gun), they should be seen more as tools designed to deal with each new challenge that Valve throws at you. Most enemies can be dealt with in a number of different ways, and you'll often find yourself experimenting and discovering new methods of dealing with past locations you've visited before.

Puzzles are also rife in *Half-Life 2*, and really come to the fore once you've acquired the aforementioned Gravity Gun. They're not as elaborate as those promised in the E3 video, but you'll still find yourself scratching your head. You'll also marvel at just how much variety can be found, especially when it starts straying into other genres (driving, survival horror, squad-based shooting) and pulls them off with little effort. *Half-Life 2* may have been a relatively rough ride for Valve during development (at one point the FBI was called in after parts of the source code were leaked), but you'd never tell from the final product. It's as finely crafted a videogame that you'll ever come across, and deserves every piece of acclaim it has received. When the G-Man states during the E3 reveal that "We've been rather busy in your absence, Mr Freeman," he certainly wasn't lying.



GAME CHANGERS

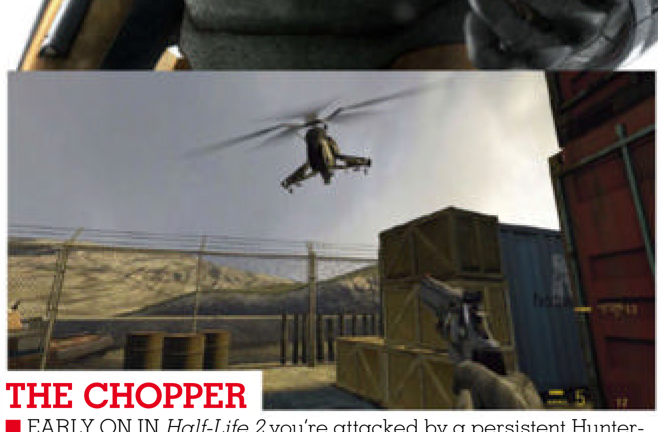
HALF-LIFE 2: DEFINING MOMENTS

VALVE'S SCI-FI SEQUEL REMAINS AN ASTONISHING GAME NEARLY A DECADE AFTER ITS RELEASE. WE REVEAL THE MOMENTS THAT WILL STAY WITH YOU FOREVER



ALYX

BIOSHOCK INFINITE'S ELIZABETH may be the new benchmark for AI in videogames, but Alyx beat her to the punch by a good nine years. Cleverly scripted and surprisingly realistic, you genuinely miss the moments when she's not around, and the adventure always picks up when she's there. The touching moments she has with Dog and father are genuinely charming, while her intelligence and well-animated expressions set her a world apart from the portrayal of women in other videogames.



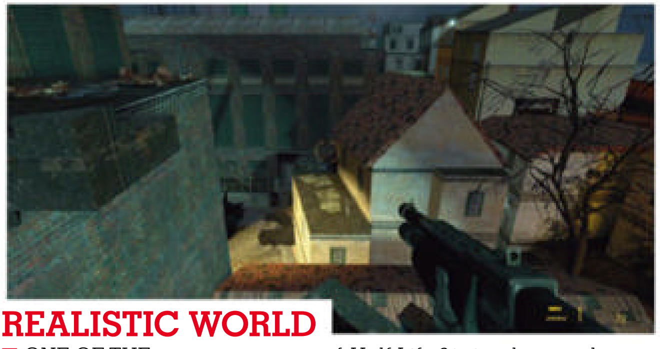
THE CHOPPER

EARLY ON IN *Half-Life 2* you're attacked by a persistent Hunter-Chopper. It follows you across several stages, causing you to scramble to safety whenever you're in an open space, or simply go underground to avoid it. Valve occasionally allows you to have a breather, but it always brings the huge gunship back at the most inopportune moments. It's not until you gain access to a gun-mounted hovercraft that you finally have the means to take the damned thing down, making its final demise that much sweeter.



RAVENHOLM

EVERY ASPECT OF Ravenholm is superb, with Valve distilling the entire survival horror genre into two of the tightest gaming hours you'll ever experience. Highlights include using buzz saws to decapitate zombies or crushing them with elaborate traps. Its highlight, however, is arguably your last final desperate race across the city's roofs and its ominous graveyard. Fast zombies surround you from all sides, with only the rattling of nearby drainpipes giving you any indication of where they will attack next.



REALISTIC WORLD

ONE OF THE greatest aspects of *Half-Life 2* is just how real everything feels. Characters appear to be going about their daily lives, helping to further paint the grim world that Valve has created, while conveniently filling you in with important information. You'll often discover neat little scenarios like friends holding each other or treating the wounded that you'd otherwise miss, as it's all subtly taking place in the background. It's amazingly effective, and adds a further layer of believability to the world.



THE BRIDGE

■ ONE OF *HALF-LIFE 2*'S tensest moments comes when you need to cross a derelict bridge. The sense of vertigo as you scramble along the loose struts is immense, and you'll need a good eye in order to find the best way across the maze of metal. Halfway across you get attacked, putting you in a frantic gunfight with nowhere to hide and an immense drop beneath you. Things get even harder once you've reached your destination, as you have to make your way back with a Combine Gunship hot on your tail.



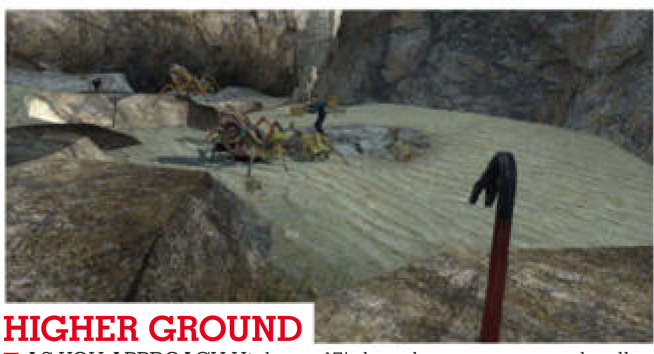
THE GRAVITY GUN

■ QUITE POSSIBLY ONE of the finest weapons in videogaming, it's rather telling that the only thing that's impressed us since is Valve's own Portal Gun. You pick this up early in your adventure, and it changes your approach to the rest of the game dramatically. Levels suddenly become puzzles, as the gun lets you manipulate objects and work out inventive ways of clearing obstacles. It's even better during the final stage as, infused with Dark Energy, you pick up enemy soldiers and throw them about like rag dolls.



HELPING THE REBELS

■ AS YOU'RE TRAVELLING along Highway 17 you encounter a small pocket of resistance fighters expecting incoming forces. Upon gaining access to a rocket launcher you're attacked by gunships and bedlam erupts. It's the first real showcase of not only the enemy AI, but your rebel compatriots. As you do your best to take down the gunship, your AI helpers will point out when your weapon needs reloading and even hand over ammo. It's an excellent sequence that adds further realism to the game world.



HIGHER GROUND

■ AS YOU APPROACH Highway 17's beach you encounter deadly Antlions that are kept at bay by machines that send vibrations through the earth. The safety of those machines is soon left behind though, and you're forced to negotiate treacherous terrain where dropping to the floor immediately causes the Antlions to attack. The tension soon racks up as you make your way across rocks and broken debris, using your gravity gun to clear large stretches of ground. It's easily one of the tensest moments in the game.



TURNING THE TABLES

■ AS *HALF-LIFE 2*'S ending draws near, you're required to assault a heavily armed prison. Enemies are everywhere, and the whole level seems to be a suicide mission. It's fortunate, then, that you've access to a new weapon that allows you to control the Antlions. After being punished by the insectoid foes in the previous levels it's gratifying to set them loose against your enemies. Similar squad tactics are used later on with rebels, but they don't feel quite as effective as they do in your first encounter.



STRIDER ATTACK

■ STRIDERS ARE HUGE tripod robots that require immense firepower to take down. Without a rocket launcher you're usually outmatched, so you'll often have to hide from them. While there are several battles where you get to take them down, by far the best moment to feature the metallic monstrosities is when you find yourself in an underground tunnel having giving one the slip. As you make your way forwards you hear a crashing from behind, only to realise that the beast has broken through the ceiling.

THE RETRO GUIDE TO... THE SIMPSONS

games™ turns the Seasons 3-9 DVDs off for a while and plays through the many games based around Matt Groening's dysfunctional cartoon family

BORN ON THE *Tracey Ullman Show* and nurtured by Fox, the Nineties witnessed *The Simpsons* immediately establish itself as the axiom of pop culture cool – and it wasted no time capitalising on it. Much like how videogames played an integral role in the upbringing of rebellious icon Bart, so too did they in the brand's unrelenting merchandise machine. Even to this day, as the series continues to celebrate a record-breaking broadcast run, the characters have proven themselves to be an equally enduring mainstay of the videogame landscape.



THE SIMPSONS ARCADE GAME
KONAMI
ARCADE, C64, PC

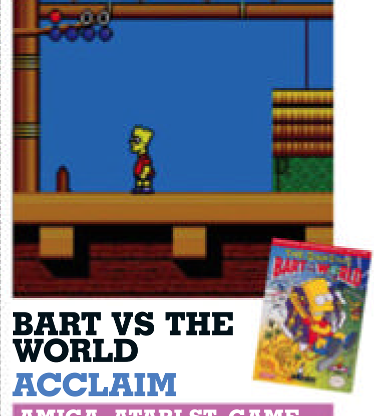
The family runs into Smithers stealing a diamond, which ends up in Maggie's mouth. He kidnaps her and the family gives chase, only to find their way blocked by countless enemies and big end-of-level bosses. A four-player experience much like another of Konami's licenced cabinets, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, this adds unique team-up attacks to the central conceit. The game is packed with references from the show, including wrestler Werner von Brawn. Levels are introduced by the white rabbit from Matt Groening's *Life In Hell* comic.

Hungarian company Novotrade was responsible for the C64 conversion, only made available in North America. They packed in all of the presentation, from the intro sequence to the ending, but it was limited to two players at a time.

BART'S HOUSE OF WEIRDNESS
KONAMI
PC

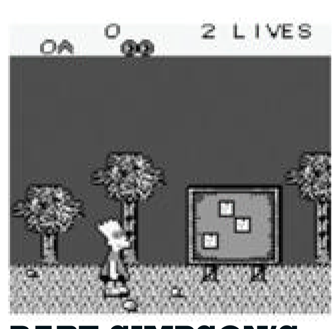
Developed by Canadian software house Distinctive, only being available for DOS makes this *Simpsons* title quite the obscure oddity. Sent to his room for playing pranks, a bored Bart escapes and travels through a series of single screens representing rooms in the house and other locations. Enemies are tackled with a variety of weapons, with each hit Bart takes reducing his Cool-o-meter. The ultimate aim is to free Krusty from the clutches of Sideshow Bob. The animation and sound samples are good for the time, however, with the gameplay boldly deviating from its other brand adaptations.





BART VS THE WORLD
ACCLAIM
AMIGA, ATARI ST, GAME GEAR, MASTER SYSTEM, NES

Bart wins a round-the-world trip for the family in a contest rigged by Mr Burns. Each country has a series of mini-games to conquer before the player tackles the boss, each a relative of Burns. The player chooses which order to play the games in, but all must be completed to advance (China, the North Pole, Egypt and Hollywood). There are questions to answer, platform levels, sliding puzzles and skateboarding sections. In each country there are Krusty-brand souvenirs to find; collecting them gives the best ending (and an extra level). It gained mixed reviews, however, and a planned C64 version was scrapped.



BART SIMPSON'S ESCAPE FROM CAMP DEADLY
ACCLAIM
GAME BOY

Pre-dating the classic 'Kamp Krusty' episode, Bart tries to escape a terrible summer camp run by Mr Burn's nephew. In a side-scrolling platform game with big characters, Bart battles the bullies and camp counsellors. Lisa's role is limited to giving Bart a boomerang and being kidnapped near the end. Enemies appearing suddenly at the screen edges make the game tougher.



THE SIMPSON
DATA EAST
PINBALL

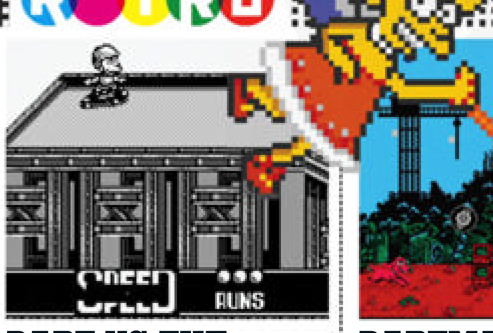
The official pinball game released just after the first series, and one of a wave of machines that revived pinball's popularity in the early Nineties. Advance the doughnut multiplier, visit Apu in the Kwik-E Mart and heat up the nuclear reactor. Activating the multiball gives you a chance to go bowling for big points.

THE SIMPSONS: BART VS THE SPACE MUTANTS
ACCLAIM/OCEAN
AMIGA, AMSTRAD, ATARI ST, C64, GAME GEAR, MASTER SYSTEM, MEGA DRIVE, NES, PC, SPECTRUM

The Space Mutants featured in a popular series of films shown in Springfield, but now they are invading for real – and only Bart can see them with his mail order X-ray specs. Across five levels he has to smash, spray paint or cover the objects the mutants need to power their machines. He can also earn tokens by freeing possessed humans, visible in X-ray mode, and these complete the name of a family member to help Bart against the end of level boss. The puzzles involve buying the right tools or toys (with hidden coins found around the levels) and even a prank call to Moe's.

Garry Kitchen and the Imagineering team created the original NES game (see interview) before Ocean and Arc Developments took on the home computer conversions. The Amiga title was bundled with new machines in the Cartoon Classics bundle for more than a year.





BART VS THE JUGGERNAUTS
ACCLAIM

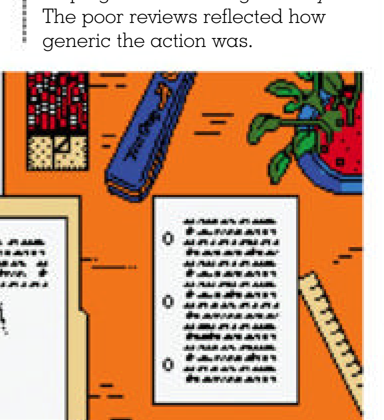
GAME BOY

In a TV-style game show inspired by *American Gladiators*, Bart must compete in a series of wacky events against the aggressive Juggernauts to win his family their very own Truckasaurus. Kent Brockman and Marvin Monroe commentate as Bart tries to earn enough money each week to advance to the next episode and ultimately the prize final. The events are simplistic and soon become repetitive, meaning there is little to come back to.

BARTMAN MEETS RADIOACTIVE MAN
ACCLAIM

GAME GEAR, NES

Reading his favourite comic, Bart is concerned when Radioactive Man does not appear to save the day – and then Fallout Boy appears, asking for Bart's help to save the superhero. Donning a purple mask and cape, Bart becomes Bartman. This is familiar platform territory for the NES, with power-ups and energy bonuses helping Bartman along the way. The poor reviews reflected how generic the action was.



BART'S NIGHTMARE
ACCLAIM

MEGA DRIVE, SNES

Bart falls asleep, and in his dream his homework is blown out of the window. Now he has to retrieve the pages to earn a good grade, playing through five different mini-games and surviving the busy street in Windy World filled with dangers. Destroy cities as Bartzilla, fly through dangerous skies as Bartman and raid the Temple of Maggie as Indiana Bart. Then go into Bart's bloodstream in a fantastic voyage and finally survive living in Itchy & Scratchy's house. Dying and taking hits in Windy World will make Bart run out of ZZZs, waking him up. Great graphics and sound are undermined by the difficulty of the mini-games.



BEHIND THE SCENES: INTERVIEW: GARRY KITCHEN
Designer, Bart Vs The Space Mutants

How did you get the licence?
Greg Fischback, President/CEO of Acclaim at the time, was the one who acquired the licence from Fox. I'm sure it wasn't easy, but that was a great strength of Greg, identifying (earlier than most) the game potential in a property. Before Acclaim, Greg was at Activision, where he grabbed the rights for *Ghostbusters* well before anyone knew it was going to be a huge movie.

How did you come up with the plot?
I called an old college buddy of mine, Barry Marx. Barry was a creative genius, a brilliant writer and completely plugged in to the TV and film industries. He filled me in on the property, quit his job, and came over to my company to work on the title. Sadly, Barry, one of the great creative minds in the gaming business, died unexpectedly at the age of 41 in 1997 from congenital heart failure. We all miss Barry!

Was it difficult to work on?
I remember some very long nights. We were approached to start the game literally a few days before the first episode ran. When the show took off in popularity, the game needed to be developed on a tremendously tight schedule. We pulled in all the talent we had to get it done ASAP. Jesse Kapili did the art, he was a brilliant graphics guy. Mark Van Hecke, an award-winning music producer, did the adaptation of the theme song, which I thought came out well considering the limited sound capability of the NES. I programmed Bart's controls and much of the first level; Roger Booth and Henry Will worked on the core technology and the other levels; and David Crane, Rob Harris, Dan Kitchen (my brother), Scott Marshall and Alex DeMeo all pitched in on programming and game design. Howard Phillips (Nintendo of America) liked it a lot, and gave us some good feedback.



KRUSTY'S FUN HOUSE / KRUSTY'S SUPER FUN HOUSE
ACCLAIM, VIRGIN

AMIGA, GAME BOY, MASTER SYSTEM, MEGA DRIVE, NES, PC, SNES

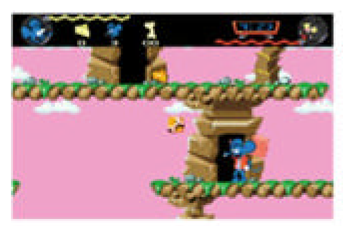
The Krusty Brand Fun House has been overrun by a swarm of rats. In each level, the rats must be guided to the extermination machine. Krusty manipulates the level by moving blocks and flipping switches, watching out for the enemies who will attack him. Passwords allow access to later levels. This started life as an Amiga game called *Rat Trap*, developed by Scott Williams and Pat Fox for Audiogenic.

VIRTUAL BART
ACCLAIM

MEGA DRIVE, SNES

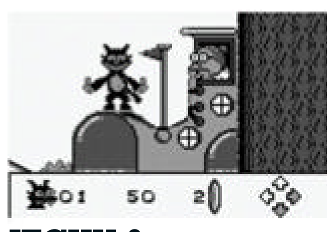
At the school science fair, Bart 'volunteers' for the virtual reality exhibit – and is sent spinning into a series of themed mini-games. Baby Bart tries to get ice cream, an older Bart rides Mount Splashmore's water slide, dinosaur Bart attacks his family – who have become cavemen – and he rides a motorbike through the desert to reach post-apocalyptic Springfield. Despite some clever effects, this was another disappointing tie-in. A Virtual Boy port was dropped due to the console being commercially duff.





THE ITCHY & SCRATCHY GAME
ACCLAIM
GAME GEAR, MEGA DRIVE, SNES

Itchy the mouse must find his way through seven themed episodes – each one a maze of platforms and doors – while fending off attacks from his eternal foe Scratchy with his mallet and weapons found around the levels. Despite the excellent animation, most gamers would have found a more authentic experience cramming TNT in their eye sockets and lighting the fuse.



ITCHY & SCRATCHY IN MINIATURE GOLF MADNESS
ACCLAIM
GAME BOY

Scratchy is trying to play crazy golf, and Itchy is out to stop him. Krusty is on hand to offer hints before each hole, and you will need them. Disappearing platforms, ramps and lifts stand in the way, along with hordes of mice who will attack the player and rob him of a life. Scratchy can fight back with his club or extra weapons collected around the course. The repetitive music can thankfully be turned off.

BART & THE BEANSTALK
ACCLAIM
GAME BOY

Software Creations mixed the story of *Jack And The Beanstalk* with a tough platform game featuring large animated characters. Bart climbs the beanstalk, defeats enemies with his slingshot and then sneaks into Giant Homer's castle before fleeing back to Earth. A set number of gold coins must be collected to advance through the seven levels. Although the scrolling is smooth, it has the same problems as *Camp Deadly* with enemies suddenly appearing.

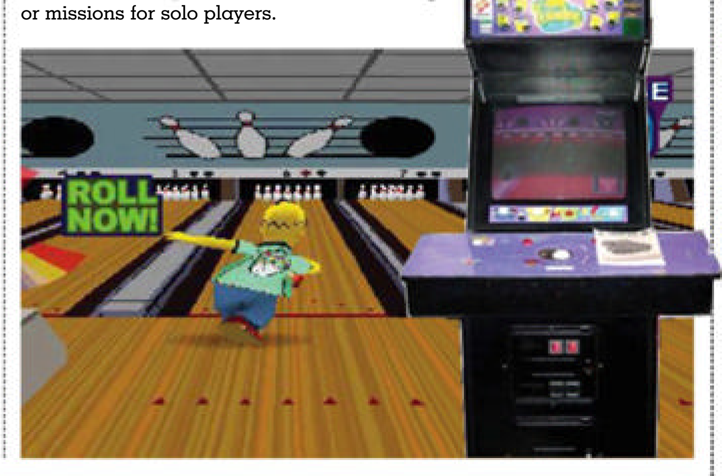


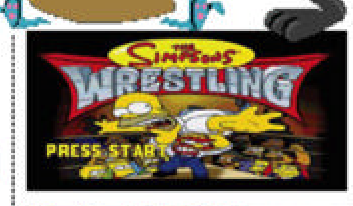
NIGHT OF THE LIVING TREEHOUSE OF HORROR
THQ
GAME BOY

Also developed by Software Creations, each of the seven levels features a story and *Simpsons* character based on a Halloween episode. The password system is useful and the graphics are good, but it is tricky to progress far.

THE SIMPSONS BOWLING
KONAMI/FOX INTERACTIVE
ARCADE

In a 3D recreation of Barney's Bowlarama, up to four players use the trackball control to bowl. There is a choice of eight different characters, and bowling well earns special balls with different effects (such as the bomb). The real problem is the lack of variety or missions for solo players.



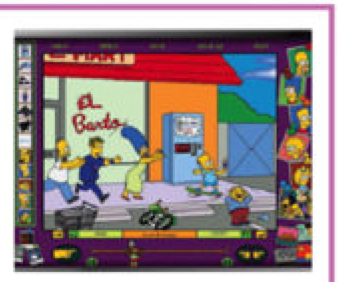


THE SIMPSONS WRESTLING
ACTIVISION
PS1

Kang and Kodos challenge Springfield to find a worthy wrestling champion to defend Earth. Three tournaments of increasing difficulty await, along with a two-player versus mode for settling scores. Each of the 19 characters (eight are initially available, the rest unlockable by winning matches) has unique moves and authentic voices. Picking up items helps – letters spell out 'TAUNT' to make the player invulnerable, while doughnuts give extra energy. The graphics attempt to create a three-dimensional cartoon look, but action can prove quite choppy. The gameplay feels more like a beat 'em up than wrestling, despite the need to win each bout by pinning the opponent. It received a thorough beating from the critics.

CARTOON STUDIO & VIRTUAL SPRINGFIELD
FOX INTERACTIVE
MAC, WINDOWS

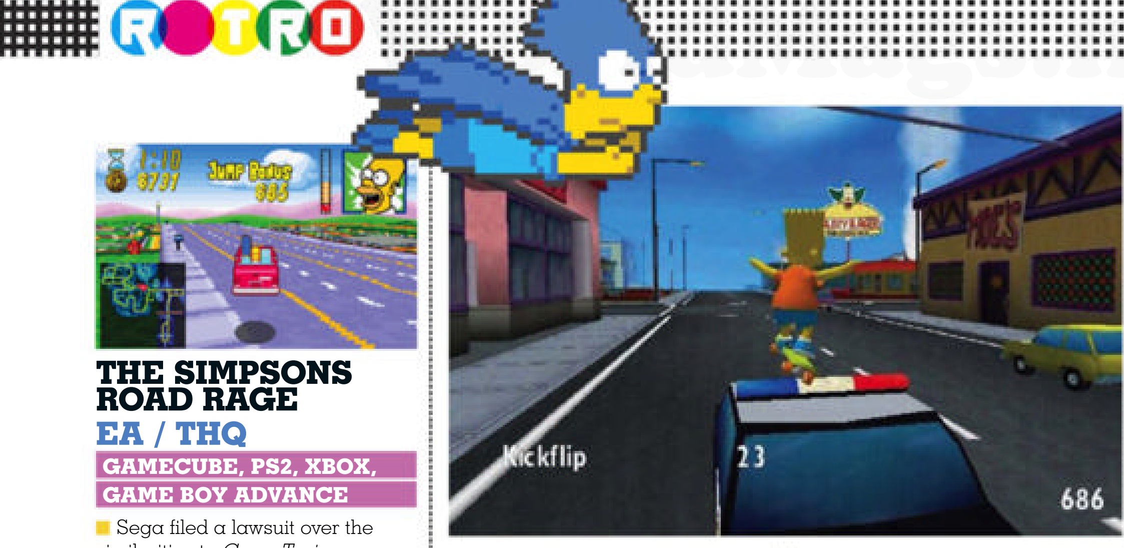
Cartoon Studio allowed the user to create and share short animations by choosing characters, sounds and backgrounds. *Virtual Springfield* sees the player explore the town in 3D, visiting familiar locations and taking part in mini-games. This included a recreation of the *Slugfest* arcade game (based on Nintendo's *Punch Out!*).





THE SIMPSONS ROAD RAGE
EA / THQ
GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX, GAME BOY ADVANCE

Sega filed a lawsuit over the similarities to *Crazy Taxi*, a case that was settled out of court. The main game sees Mr Burns buying up public transport, so the residents use their personal vehicles to pick up passengers and drive them to their destination. Sunday Drive allows players to drive around without a time limit, and there are ten additional missions in Mission Mode. Additional characters and vehicles are unlocked with progress and earning higher scores. The GBA version was disappointing and received poor reviews.

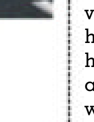


THE SIMPSONS SKATEBOARDING
EA
PS2

Critics loathed the combination of extreme sports and Springfield, but there is depth, with over ten locations and multiple characters with different moves. Skatefest sets a series of tasks to do in each location, Trick Contest challenges you to set a high score and HORSE is a head-to-head competition for two players.

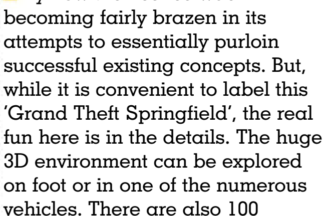
THE SIMPSONS PINBALL PARTY
STERN
PINBALL

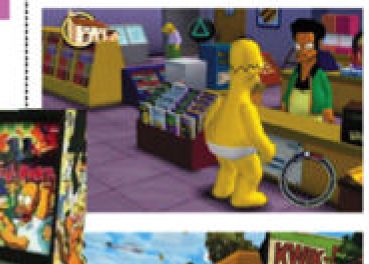
A decade after the first game, Stern created a new table with new features – a second playfield, dot matrix display and a moving Homer head. Hitting the couch enables multiball, and the cast provides dialogue. It became one of Stern's bestselling tables.



THE SIMPSONS HIT & RUN
VIVENDI
GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX, WINDOWS

By now the licence was becoming fairly brazen in its attempts to essentially purloin successful existing concepts. But, while it is convenient to label this 'Grand Theft Springfield', the real fun here is in the details. The huge 3D environment can be explored on foot or in one of the numerous vehicles. There are also 100 hidden trading cards. Missions have a humorous twist, and the authentic voices and sounds work well.





"I JUST REMEMBER AN INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF PASSION FROM EVERYONE INVOLVED IN HIT & RUN"



BEHIND THE SCENES: INTERVIEW: JOE MCGINN
Designer, Road Rage and Hit & Run

How did *Road Rage* begin?
We knew Fox was looking for a *Simpsons* driving game. Lead designer Carey Du Gray and I took a walk on the Vancouver waterfront to discuss ideas. The typical solution was to make a kart racer. The appeal of picking up and dropping off passengers was inspired by *Crazy Taxi*, but it wasn't so much the gameplay as frequent character interactions, we saw that as a rich opportunity for exploiting *Simpsons* humour.

We worked pretty hard on a 'cartoon shader' that made it look like the TV show. Matt Groening initially approved it, but as we neared beta he decided it didn't look 3D enough. So we spent the summer before shipping *Road Rage* working very long hours. The EA *Simpsons* game that came out a couple years ago looks exactly like *Road Rage* looked throughout most of production!

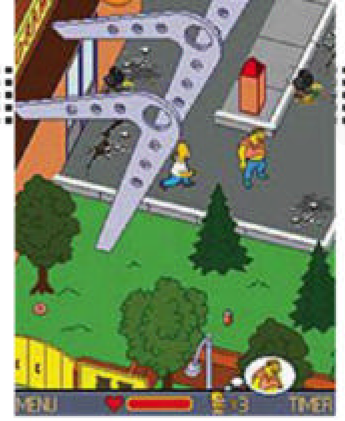
What are your memories of making *Hit & Run*?
I just remember an incredible level of passion from everyone involved. Do you remember the collector cards? That was our gift to the hardcore *Simpsons* fans. Our design goal was that every fan would be able to find a reference from their favourite episode. From 'Gummi Venus de Milo' to 'Crab Juice', it's all in the cards.

While *GTA III* inspired the game overall – the game elevator pitch was '*GTA* for kids' – the gameplay was actually more inspired by the original *Driver*.

Most of the dialogue and jokes were written internally by game designer Chris Mitchell. You won't find this listed in the credits or in any articles about the game, but it's about time Chris got the credit he deserves. And it was the final game for designer Richard Mul (famed for his contributions to the *Need For Speed* series at EA); he tragically passed away not long after the game shipped.

Why did you use pay phones?
The Simpsons writers couldn't decide whether cell phones existed in the *Simpsons* universe or not. Eventually they said no, so the pay phones were our back-up plan.





MINUTES TO MELTDOWN

EA

MOBILE

The nuclear plant will explode in 30 minutes, so Homer must race through Springfield to prevent the catastrophe. Blocking his way are puzzles – find a cup of coffee to sober up Barney, for example. The isometric style was re-used for *Itchy & Scratchy Land*.



ITCHY & SCRATCHY LAND

EA

MOBILE

Just like the classic episode, the animatronic robots at the theme park have gone crazy. Homer, Marge, Bart and Lisa must escape the four themed areas of the park, killing robots and rescuing Springfield citizens from harm's way.

THE SIMPSONS GAME EA

DS, PS2, PS3, PSP, WII, X360

Writers from the TV show were involved, helping to make it one of the best efforts yet with over 4 million sales. It won a Writers Guild of America award for the script and a Spike award for best TV or movie tie-in. The plot sees the family realising they are living in a videogame, allowing the designers to pack in parodies of popular titles (*Medal Of Homer*, *Grand Theft Scratchy*) and a cameo from *The Sims* creator Will Wright as he attempts to destroy the 8-bit incarnation of the family. Different family members have skills and special moves, with two players co-operating and a solo player switching characters. The excellent cel-shaded 3D graphics are let down by the dodgy camera, however, the PS2 suffering the most in split-screen mode. Completing each main level unlocks an additional time challenge. The DS version wisely stuck to 2D and became a horizontal scroller, adding exclusive content like mini-games to unlock and a pet Homer to play with. EA Redwood Shores was planning a sequel, but ultimately development was cancelled.

THE SIMPSONS ARCADE EA

IOS, MOBILE, PS3, X360



The downloadable PS3 and X360 versions were true to the original arcade game, with a choice of online or local multiplayer modes. Completing the game unlocks the Japanese ROM, which has different settings and mini atomic bombs to clear the screen of attackers. Completing multiple times with different characters unlocks additional artwork

The iOS version is rather different. A solo Homer faces up to a conspiracy of Springfield residents known as Operation Mission. Other family members appear to offer special attacks that last for a limited time. Mini-games include reviving Homer by slapping him around the face and catching doughnuts.

TAPPED OUT

EA

ANDROID, IOS

When Homer gets distracted by his MyPad, a nuclear meltdown wipes out Springfield. Cleaning up debris and completing tasks earns money, allowing new buildings and characters to be purchased. XP is collected to level up and reach tougher missions.

New and exclusive content is regularly added, tying in with new episodes and special events – for example, Whacking Day has seen Homer tackling an invasion of snakes. Premium items are bought with doughnuts, earned slowly in the game or purchased as IAP, but it is possible to enjoy the game without spending cash (the game is free to download). Be warned, however – it is a real time-sink.





ESSENTIALS 10 OF THE BEST OPEN WORLDS

Open worlds have evolved over the last two generations. With games like *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* and *Watch Dogs* on the horizon, pushing the boundaries on what we expect from open worlds, we look back at ten of the best sandbox environments. It's a paradigm that took off after the enormous success of *Grand Theft Auto III* in 2001, yet other high-end titles have used a similar template to build on different genres.



Azeroth
Game: World Of Warcraft

1 MMOs are without a doubt the ultimate purveyor of the open world; lands such as Azeroth offer tens of thousands of players welcomed refuge from their boredom every minute of the day. Brimming with exciting adventure and ripe for exploration, the four continents of Azeroth can be quite a dangerous place for the uninitiated. From the jungles of Stranglethorn Vale, conquered by legions of griefers, to the safe havens of Stormwind and Ogrimmar – Azeroth is one of the most accomplished open worlds in videogames, with over ten million gamers enjoying its rich and ever-evolving landscape for close to a decade now.

Liberty City
Game: Grant Theft Auto IV

2 Liberty City has been the basis for its fair share of *GTA* games, but it was *Grand Theft Auto IV*'s representation that resonates in memory the strongest. A sandbox built on the grounds of a real-life New York City, it has a mythical quality that perfectly captures its inspiration. More so than any other open world we have encountered, it brings the game around it to life with unmistakable ease. The streets are bustling; the AI walks the Liberty City streets going about their daily activities; skyscrapers touch the clouds and cast shadows over the most famous New York landmarks. *GTA IV* is a triumph for open world-based design.

Washington D.C
Game: Fallout 3

3 Bethesda had already surprised a generation once with *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, but the studio exceeded expectation with *Fallout 3*'s futuristic post-apocalyptic interpretation of Washington DC. The lone wanderer's exit from Vault 101 revealed a world teeming with moral ambiguity and the somehow beautiful remnants of structures that are dotted throughout the Capital Wasteland. There are miles of land out there that you may never see on your journey, but someone will; *Fallout 3*'s world will give you as much as you're willing to invest. Let's hope Bethesda comes back to this world on next-gen hardware – the potential is unlimited.

Kingdom Of Lordran
Notable Releases: Dark Souls

4 The Kingdom Of Lordran is a rather peculiar land. *Dark Souls* features an open world unlike any other; its design is solely to punish temptation. You are completely welcome to go off the beaten track at any given time, with the game letting you venture out into the wild in order to explore for secrets and lore that's hidden away within the Kingdoms' walls at will, but it will almost certainly lead to a bonfire-less death. The path of least resistance often bares the greater fruit in *Dark Souls*; however, the adventurous spirits among us should note that the pilgrimage through Lordran can be a rather wildly engrossing experience.

Minecraft
Notable Releases: Minecraft

5 Due to its lack of narrative or restraint, *Minecraft* is the epitome of an open-world design. With imagination, the procedurally generated world of *Minecraft* can become whatever you want it to be. The ultimate sandbox world, it lets players mine, smash and craft the land into whatever they want it to be; narratives can be crafted, kingdoms can be built and adventures are waiting to be had – you just have to have the inclination first. *Minecraft* has become a phenomenon, but for this console generation, it is the perfect vehicle for artistic expression, and no open world before it has given its citizens that level of freedom so successfully.



The Wild West
Notable Releases:
Red Dead Redemption

6 Rockstar is the master of the open world, but perhaps the studio's greatest accomplishment is the portrayal of the old west in *Red Dead Redemption*. Its scope is above and beyond any other, thriving with life and draped in atmosphere; it is a world designed to waste away hours on horseback soaking up the culture of a much-loved era. Crossing the river to Mexico and discovering the cascading hills and low valleys of Nuevo Paraiso represents a highlight. Taking to the small settlements, the forgotten paths through woodland or strolling alongside a railroad, there's nothing like this jaunt through the American Frontier's final years.

San Francisco
Notable Releases:
Driver: San Francisco

7 While many of the locations on this list strive for geographical clarity, only a few attempt to recreate the cities they drew so much influence from. The city by the bay was recreated for *Driver: San Francisco*, letting players cruise the sun-basked streets in a multitude of Seventies' muscle cars for one of the most enjoyable driving games this generation. Unlike most open world games, *Driver* doesn't let you get out from behind the wheel, yet you don't feel restricted. If you want to let loose and relax to some great music, this portrayal of San Francisco is designed for gamers who just want to drive.

Cyrodiil
Notable Releases:
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

8 It is easy enough to applaud *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* for its open world; however, it's impossible to overlook the impact that *Oblivion* had on a generation discovering the power of next-generation systems. Cyrodiil is a living and breathing landscape, its cities absolutely filled with life and its dirt paths always leading to discovery. Every venture into the beautiful undergrowth and forests leads to a new adventure, whether it be a gorgeous vista to admire or a host of enemies to slay in order to save a unicorn – *Oblivion*'s world is undoubtedly one of the crowning achievements of modern game design.

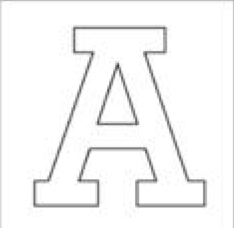
Panau
Notable Releases:
Just Cause 2

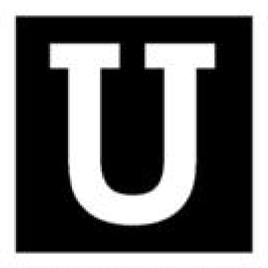
9 The Island Of Panau wrestled for its place in this list with *Far Cry 3*'s tropical paradise, but ultimately it's absolutely impossible to overlook the madness that can ensue in Panau. Built with the daredevil in mind, Panau became a hotbed of noise and destruction as players utilised a range of abilities, from grapple hook stunts to parachutes, in order to explore the island heralded as the largest open world game to date. Everything came second to the adventure, and absolutely nothing beats the thrill of leaping from a plane at nauseating altitude and seeing the entire island stretch out before your eyes.

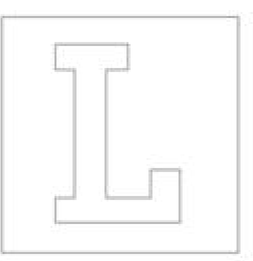
Los Angeles
Notable Releases:
LA Noire

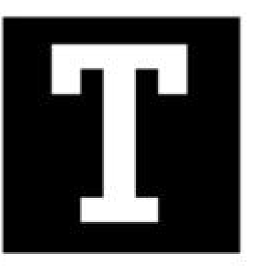
10 Los Angeles has somewhat of a habit of cropping up in these kinds of lists, however, Team Bondi's faithful recreation of 1940 LA is beyond impressive. The game was a period piece as much as anything else; a window into a time passed by. Its narrative stuck to a relatively strict timeline, however, that did not mean you couldn't jump into a car and cruise the streets, basking in a much loved era. Many of Team Bondi's staff worked on painstakingly recreating London town for the often forgotten *The Getaway*, though they managed to surpass all expectation with the hard work and dedication that they put into Forties LA.

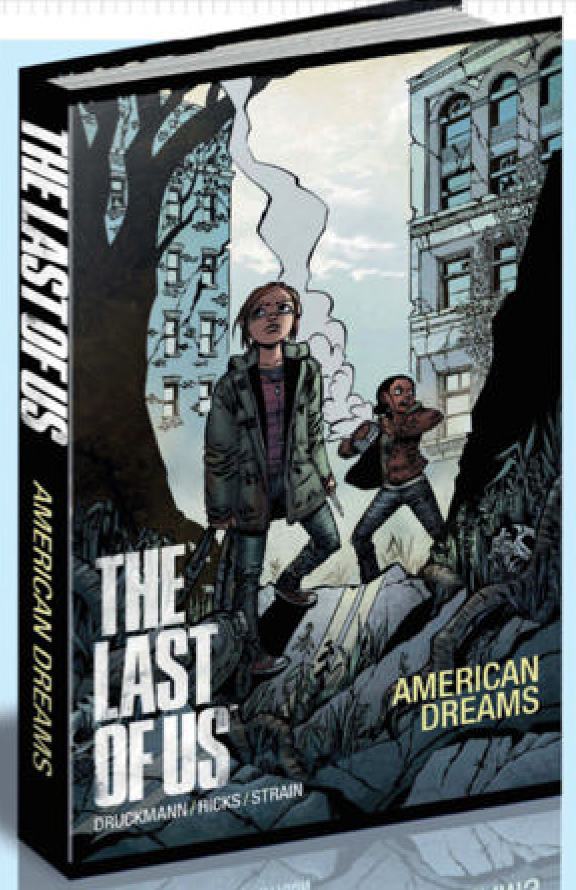






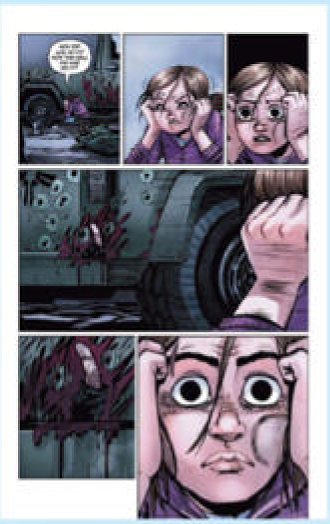






THE LAST OF US: AMERICAN DREAMS

MANUFACTURER: **Dark Horse** / PRICE: **$3.99 (each)**



ON THE EVE of *The Last Of Us*' release, Dark Horse invites those eagerly awaiting Naughty Dog's grim successor to the adventures of Nathan Drake a peek inside the ravaged, desolate world of the game's hardened survivors. Creative director Neil Druckmann collaborates with indie web artist Faith Erin Hicks for *The Last Of US: American Dreams*, which eschews traditional post-apocalyptic bleakness and forgoes the expected harsh *Walking Dead*-style brushstrokes, instead pouring naive optimism into each panel, as teenage whims and wide-eyed characters stride at the forefront of an otherwise dour milieu. It's from the perspective of 13-year-old Ellie that the story plays out, as she is reluctantly enrolled in a military boarding school and immersed into the harshness of her new environment. The first few chapters do an impressive job of introducing the street-savvy teenager, before she's totally corrupted by the horrors that loom beyond the borders of the campus.

It also establishes some of the potential threats/allies that walk among the rogue factions that Ellie and Joel encounter throughout the game's thrilling campaign. But most of all it invests in Ellie as a character across its four issues, fleshing her out as strong-willed and intrepid aid to the browbeaten Joel. There are a few complaints, mainly that the pacing will prove too ponderous for many, and its weird moments of misguided cheesiness that infect the otherwise deadpan art and story. Despite these minor flaws it's nonetheless an involving and entertaining accompaniment to Naughty Dog's exceptional vision.





GAMING CLOTHING



ASSASSIN'S CREED III CONNOR BELT

An exact replica of the belt worn by *ACIII*'s protagonist, and now *you* have the opportunity to dress like the boring hero of the disappointing sequel.
www.tinyurl.com/onrmxdj



N7 PERFORMANCE HOODY

This N7 hoody is probably the sort of casual garb that Commander Shepard adorns when he's hitting the gym after making a quick pit stop to save the universe.
www.tinyurl.com/of7zmvb



LADIES' NEW CA REPUBLIC T-SHIRT

If you're a big fan of Democracy, liberty, and the rule of law against the backdrop of a charred post-apocalyptic landscape then pledge your allegiance to the NCR today.
www.tinyurl.com/o6yo5r9



THE HISTORY OF SONIC COLLECTOR'S EDITION

RETAILER: **SONICMERCHANDISE.COM**/ PRICE: **£29.99**

AFTER A FIFTH of a century since its Mega Drive debut, what better way to celebrate the heritage and endurance of the rocketing hedgehog? As with the original edition released in 2012, the compendium charts the origins of *Sonic The Hedgehog* with original sketches, artwork and interviews contributing to an incredibly insightful read. The collector's edition contains all of the above, with the only difference being a shiny cover and its limited print. But for fans of the eponymous blue speedster it'll surely be incentive enough.



TURTLE BEACH EAR FORCE PX 22

MANUFACTURER: **TURTLE BEACH**/ PRICE: **£69.99**

AS THE MARKETPLACE for headphones continues to predominantly cater for either the cheap or ultra-budget pro-gamer consumer, mid-range headsets barely get a look in. This is a shame, as Turtle Beach's PX 22 headphones prove to be more than an adequate alternative to its pricier stablemates, offering a crisp audio experience without leaving your wallet looking forlorn. Firstly, it delivers a superb 5.1 surround-sound audio across all current-gen consoles and mobile devices, but it's made more impressive by the sleek, lightweight design that lacks the over-designed heft of its high-end competitors. This is a sharp choice for both discerning PC and console gamers.

STEELSERIES APEX RAW KEYBOARD

MANUFACTURER: **STEELSERIES** / PRICE: **£59.99**

THE APEX RAW is designed to be a gaming keyboard that doesn't *look* like a gaming keyboard. No sharp-pointed edges, there's a noticeable lack of arbitrary appendages bolted on to every side, and no sign of glowy bits. Oh, alright, there are a few glowy bits. But ultimately this is a no-frills, high-end and respectfully minimalist keyboard, featuring 34 macro keys, interchangeable feet, raised macro keys and a SteelSeries key that enables users to perform special functions. With its elegant and functional design, it's worth considering as both a tentative step into the realm of pro gaming and a slightly more refined choice for seasoned vets.




gamesTM
MMO
The essential guide to the online gaming universe
WORLDS
158 INTERVIEW
BLIZZARD
Chatting World Of Warcraft and the elusive Titan, Blizzard opens up about its development process
160 FEATURE
MY AVATAR
Star Wars: The Old Republic lead designer reveals his Sith Sorcerer and Gunslinger to gamesTM
156 PREVIEW
THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE
Seven reasons why Bethesda's expansive MMO should appeal to Skyrim fans
A Beginner's Guide To...
EVE ONLINE
Your entryway into another world, gamesTM presents a guidebook to CCP's vast intergalactic MMO
WorldMags.net



VITAL STATS

PLAYERS: 500,000
SHARDS: 1 (not inc. China)
SERVER LOCATION: London
RECORD PLAYERS ONLINE: 65,303
YEARS RUNNING: 10
EXPANSIONS: 19
CHARACTERS PER ACCOUNT: 3
MONTHLY COST: £9.99
SPIN-OFFS: Dust 514
DEMOGRAPHICS: 95% male
AVERAGE PLAYTIME PER WEEK: 18 hours
AVERAGE WALLET BALANCE: 1 billion ISK

Beginners Guide

EVE ONLINE

SOME PEOPLE THINK OF IT AS A GAME. TO ITS PLAYERS, IT'S A WHOLE OTHER UNIVERSE

No matter how many MMOs you've played, you've never played anything like *Eve Online*. To start playing is to be dropped into the middle of deep space with nothing but a fragile ship, in a galaxy where player-run corporations call the shots and trust is a more valuable currency than anything that can be gathered up and thrown into a trade window. Lose your ship, and it's gone, no matter how valuable. Make enemies, and prepare to deal with the consequences, including paid bounty hunters. *Eve Online* is harsh, unforgiving, and hardcore. On the plus side though, that harshness also makes any successes and friendships all the more important.

Another part of the experience is that while *Eve* 'only' has 500,000 players, it also only has one server – all players are part of one single shared shard/universe. That makes it a place where stories happen, from epic heists and ruthless cons, to events like "Burn Jita", in which thousands of players launched an all-out assault on the game's economy, setting thousands of ships on fire in the Jita area. Developer CCP is even planning a television series based on players' stories, collected at **www.truestories.eveonline.com**. It's worth reading a few before jumping in, to get both a feel for the universe, and an idea of what to look forward to after enduring the often-tedious early stages of finding a place within it.

Which guide would you like to see tackled next?
Let us know on Twitter or Facebook




Exploring a new frontier

GETTING STARTED WITH EVE

CREATING THE NEW YOU

1 *EVE* ALLOWS FOR an intimidating amount of control over who you play as, especially given the complexity of the game. Choose carefully – most of the details can't be changed once fixed, though most early decisions are cosmetic or easily changed later. Along with choosing pieces, you can drag individual body parts to reshape your look in more detail. Don't worry that the new you inevitably looks miserable during this. What other players will actually see in-game are posed shots that you create after this stage, where it's possible to drag a smile/frown onto that face, shift their stance to something less rigid, and create a snapshot with a more relaxed attitude (or an even sterner one, if you prefer).





ENDURING THE TUTORIAL

2 YES, IT'S DULL. Yes, it's vital. The raw 'here's how to fly around' introduction doesn't take long, and provides a free ship and some starting funds and equipment. It continues after you're cut loose, though, via a set of NPC Career Agents you're introduced to, who offer focused training on Business, Exploration, Industry and Military matters. They're optional, but give a solid feel for the various jobs you can pick up. Even so, expect to spend a lot of time with wikis and watching YouTube videos. The in-game advice combined barely scratches the surface, and even then, only of the official content. Most of *Eve* is player-driven, and can only be learned through experience and getting involved with others.

FIRST STEPS INTO THE UNIVERSE

3 THERE ARE NO set character classes in *Eve*; just possible things you can head out and do – some more dangerous than others. As a new player, focus will be on something relatively safe like mining, rather than high-risk ventures like bounty hunting. Skills unlock the ability to use better equipment, improving over time. The first real one you get is the ability to command frigates – an initially intimidating seven-hour wait to acquire (nothing compared to later skills). The timer ticks whether online or not though; you can queue up numerous skills for your character to develop while in the real world.





STAYING OUT OF TROUBLE

4 SECURITY IN *EVE Online* works much like the real world. Nothing will prevent you doing bad things, like trying to blow up another player. Where you do it does, however, affect the response, especially whether or not cops will show up. Everywhere in the galaxy has a security number. High-Sec (1.0-0.5) is 'safe', being civilised space with fast-responding CONCORD NPC police designed to be able to save the day and destroy the attacking ship at least most of the time. Having a criminal record doesn't prevent you going there, but it can mean getting attacked by weaker security forces. Low-Sec (0.5-0.1) is riskier, with no saviour cops, but crimes still registered. Nullsec (0.0) is lawless. Beware.

LIVING WITH DEATH

5 DEATH IS INEVITABLE, and not the end of the world. If you lose a ship, you're ejected out of it in a pod to jump into/buy a new one with the money you hopefully have. It's also possible to take out assorted insurance plans once you get better ships, recovering a decent proportion of the purchase price – 40 per cent being free and standard. You can never be left without a ride though, with basic 'Rookie Ships' available for free to any player who needs one. If your attacker wants to rub it in though, they can also destroy the pod. At this point, a cloned 'you' takes over, at the potential cost of a percentage of skill points depending on how advanced a backup you bought.

7 REASONS SKYRIM FANS SHOULD CARE ABOUT THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE

WE GOT HANDS-ON WITH BETHESDA'S MMO, NOW COMING TO PS4 AND XBOX ONE AS WELL AS PC – BUT HOW WILL THE GAME FARE WITH SINGLE-PLAYER ELDER SCROLLS FANS?



[1] THE STORYTELLING IS ABOUT AS GOOD

■ SO FAR, anyway. Our first quest in *TESO* started with a dog looking sad outside Daggerfall and eventually led to an assassination plot involving a key figure within the town. It has that escalating quality that all of *Skyrim*'s best quests have, that you think you're doing one thing only to find yourself as part of a much larger story. That important element from the modern *Elder Scrolls* games has made the jump.

[2] OBLIVION-QUALITY VISUALS (ALMOST)

■ WHILE NOT quite hitting the same levels of fidelity as *Oblivion*, the colour palette and sharp environments are definitely impressive. The art direction is a little softer on the fantasy side than the grimness seen in *Skyrim*, leaning more towards the slightly brighter palettes seen in *Oblivion* and *Morrowind*. The ships in Daggerfall harbour looked particularly nice, and it certainly looks like it fits the visual rules of the *Elder Scrolls* universe.

[3] THE COMBAT IS CONTEMPORARY

■ LIKE *SKYRIM*, *TESO* is a sharp action game as well as a full-featured RPG. Commands are assigned to hotkeys, and the powers resemble those used in *Skyrim*, only with a few more hand-to-hand specific options to give you an advantage in combat. This has always been the key to *Elder Scrolls*' continued success – accessibility through interaction. *TESO* is easy to get to grips with in this regard, and should serve *Skyrim* fans well.



[4] THE ONLINE FEATURES DO WORK

■ UNLIKE *SKYRIM*, you're not quite as well equipped to spam enemies with your sword then run away before tactically defeating them – you feel very underpowered by comparison, here, and therefore leaning on teamwork does have a beneficial effect when taking on larger foes. This is particularly useful during a quest where you have to harvest items from nearby enemies; we only managed to get what we needed after teaming up with other players.

[5] IT CAN BE PLAYED LIKE SKYRIM

■ SOMEONE INVITED us to join their group during our hands-on session; we said no. On this occasion, we wanted to absorb *TESO* as a single-player experience, and elected not to join forces with the journalist trying to derp into our game. You'll bump into other players a lot, naturally, but there were many moments off in the wilds where we felt fairly alone in this giant environment. You can do that if you want to.

[6] THE WORLD

■ THE FORMAT of *TESO* is the same – you can either carry on with proper quests or get out there and explore. It's a pretty, varied world, and we encountered ruins and dungeons within just a few minutes of walking outside Daggerfall. We went into a dungeon and got battered by two enemies, running away with our tail between our legs. Not as easy as *Skyrim*, but it's clear that there's a lot out there to see, just from an hour of exploring a nearby area, which is the lifeblood of any Bethesda RPG.

[7] FETCH QUESTS WITHOUT BEING FETCH QUESTS

■ YOU'RE ALWAYS trawling across the environment in *Elder Scrolls*' games, bringing one thing to another part of the world as part of pretty much all of your quests. They're fetch jobs, basically – yet there are always surprises in store that make them feel like more than fetch quests. The same applies here. One of the more interesting parts of the game we played involved raiding a pirate ship in Daggerfall harbour and seeking out assassins hidden away on there; you were basically going there to kill a load of enemies, but the narrative frames it in an intriguing way.

■ PvP is undergoing a massive change as Resilience becomes a base stat for all characters. Blizzard is attempting to open Battlegrounds up to more players, so those geared for PvE content will find their items scale in PvP modes to an appropriate level. No excuse now.

Trouble In Paradise

CAN WORLD OF WARCRAFT CONTINUE TO SUSTAIN BLIZZARD?

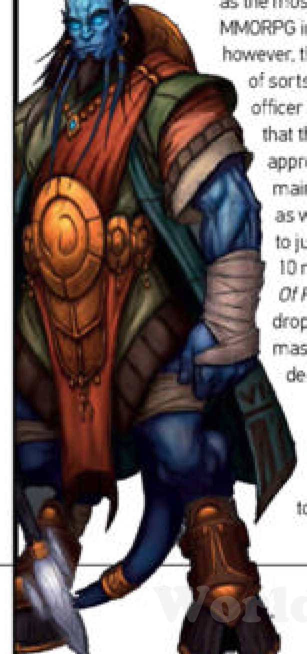
Earlier in the year, Blizzard Entertainment hit the reset button on its unannounced MMO, codenamed *Titan*, shifting over three quarters of its 100-strong team onto other internal projects. Blizzard has never been lauded for its speedy development times, but with *Titan* now pushed back to 2016 at the earliest, it may be time to question *World Of Warcraft*'s ability to lead the studio in light of recent struggles.

"We've always had a highly iterative development process, and the unannounced MMO is no exception," revealed Blizzard spokesperson Shon Damron. "We've come to a point where we need to make some large design and technology changes to the game. We're using this opportunity to shift some of our resources to assist with other projects while the core team adapts our technology and tools to accommodate these new changes."

This is fairly standard practice for Blizzard, who is not afraid to cancel projects that have been in development for years if they fail to match a benchmark of quality.

INFORMATION

FORMAT: PC
PUBLISHER: Blizzard
DEVELOPER: In-house
ORIGIN: US



Considering the current state of Azeroth, this puts a lot of weight onto the weary shoulders of *World Of Warcraft*.

World Of Warcraft has been generating an estimated 1 billion dollars in revenue for years; no surprise considering its position as the most popular subscription-based MMORPG in the world. After nine years, however, the game is facing an exodus of sorts. Activision chief executive officer Bobby Kotick recently revealed that the game has seen a "decline of approximately 1.3 million subscribers, mainly from the East but in the West as well," in the first quarter of 2013 to just above 8 million, down from 10 million last year when *Mists Of Pandaria* launched. It's a steep drop, and highlights how much the massively multiplayer RPG is in desperate need of a shake-up.

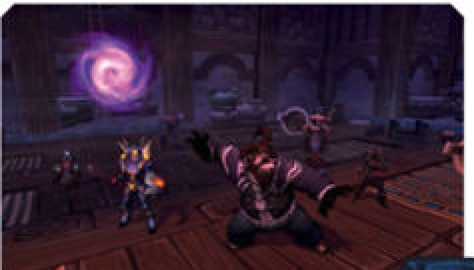
"In *Cataclysm* players would hit the end game and say 'Now what do I do? I don't have a raiding guild and I'm not good enough to PvP', and they felt like there wasn't content for them. *World Of Warcraft* has always been a game about levelling up, and it was shifting to a game that focused on max level," says lead systems designer Greg 'Ghostcrawler' Street. "We made a huge effort in *Mists Of Pandaria* to provide lots of content for end-game players of all skill levels and interests."

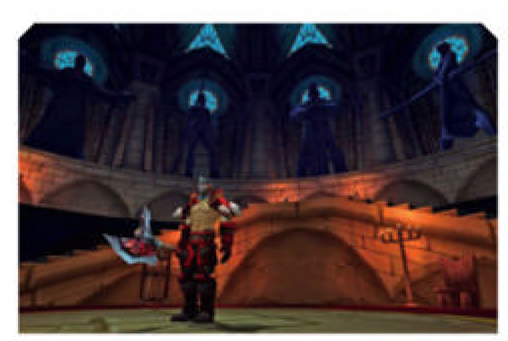
For many, it's been a successful expansion. But for 1.3 million players, something about *Mists Of Pandaria* hasn't resonated. Pandaria is perhaps one of the best designed continents within Azeroth, but a return to the grind-heavy dailies of *The Burning Crusade* has been a turn-off. Blizzard recognised the need for change; it's introducing new ways to experience current content, and also bring Pandaria's major storyline to an end – perhaps in preparation of the elusive fifth expansion.

"Patch 5.4 will be the big conclusion to the Pandaren storyline, and features Garosh prominently. We won't leave Pandaria behind entirely, but players will spend some time in Orgrimmar," says Street, hinting at the Siege of Orgrimmar

Patch 5.4 will see the launch of 'flexible raids', a system that scales its difficulty depending on the size of your pre-made group. It should mean casual guilds and adventurers with bountiful friends' lists have new opportunities to experience the current content and get geared.

"Warcraft would be enormously successful with far fewer players than we still have"





As the Pandaren story reaches its conclusion, there's still time to gear up. If you're at level 90, an hour or so every night will see you ready for current content in around two weeks.

raid, which will see Alliance and Horde rally forces against a Sha corrupted Garosh.

"Beyond that, we have new stories we are ready to tell – future expansions are going to be in different locations and not necessarily in Pandaria again."

World Of Warcraft is facing more competition than ever. With *Titan* out of the picture, it'll be a massive test of the market for Blizzard to keep hold of subscribers, especially as we're seeing more titles switch in favour of a free-to-play model; a change the developer is reluctant to move towards. For Blizzard, the strategy is simple: to release more content faster. Developers working on the patches and expansion couldn't be happier to deliver new experiences in Azeroth, hinting at another reason for *Titan*'s delay: there's still plenty of life in *World Of Warcraft*.

"What's hardest for me to deal with is there are players who still love *Warcraft* and want to know if we're still committed," says Street. "I think they're worried that if there's enough negativity we'll say 'We're done', and that couldn't be further from the truth."

"We're doubling down on the game, hiring more developers to get content out faster and we want to make sure players understand *Warcraft* isn't going anywhere. It would be enormously successful with far fewer players than we still have; we have a long-term commitment to the game."

"Strategically the one thing we want to do is get more content out faster. Whenever there's a lull that lasts too long, players lose interest. We always get a lot of players who come back for every new expansion and we believe if we can keep expansions coming out at a fairly steady clip then just as they start to get tired of the current content, there is new content on the horizon."

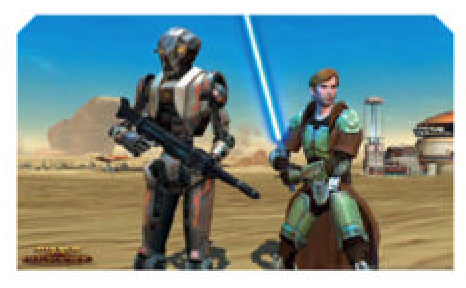
Blizzard has provided a playground for adventurers for close to ten years, and shows no sign of slowing down. The market is tough, but the developers working on the new content understand the changing mind-set of its players. A new expansion will see a rush of returning veterans, but it's the strength of the patch content – and the core design – that will ultimately seal Azeroth's success into its second decade of life.

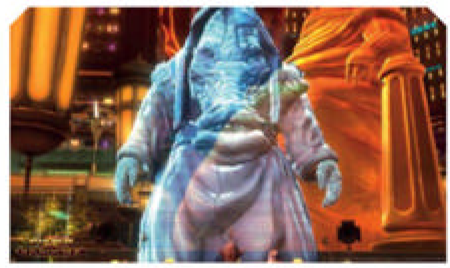
ON THE CARDS

AS *WORLD OF Warcraft* moves into its second decade, we are likely to see Blizzard integrating the world of Azeroth with more games from its stable. *Hearthstone: Heroes Of Warcraft* is a digital card battle game that puts an action slant on a familiar genre. While *Hearthstone* is looking great, it's the integration it could have with *World Of Warcraft* that has us truly excited. Aside from the joy of challenging players in your local tavern or trading cards over the auction house, Greg Street presents a concept that the team at Blizzard is investigating, that would not only help to bring some of the free-to-play card collectors back into Azeroth, but take some of its raiders out there as well.

"We've talked a lot about really cool things we can do, like maybe you beat a raid boss and he drops his card that you can then use in *Hearthstone*. That's a natural way to go, assuming *Hearthstone* does as well as we hope it does. It's a really fun game, which I don't think you can necessarily see when watching videos. When you get into it and play it, it's a lot of fun! A lot of love and Blizzard polish went into it."







Damion Schubert

Lead designer, Star Wars: The Old Republic

AVATAR NAME: I'm not prepared to let my guildmates know there's a developer spying on them!

LEVEL: 55

FACTION/CLASS: Currently running endgame with a Sith Sorcerer, and levelling a Gunslinger on the other faction. I'm also levelling a Gunslinger.

COMPANION: I run Khem'Val when I need a tank, and Ashara when I don't.

Describe your loadout: I'm currently Madness specced for maximum DoT and Force Storm wreckage. However, I frequently respecialise to heal. I enjoy healing flashpoints quite a bit.

Most epic quest (your defining memory of playing the game): Such a hard question to answer without giving spoilers. I will say that my favourite part of our writing tends to be companion smack talk, so I guess I'll say the final Bounty Hunter quest, because not only did I find the final series of confrontations awesome, but Gault was at his wisecracking smarminess. Anyone who loves sarcasm needs to play a Bounty Hunter with Gault out.

> "My favourite part of the Makeb experience has genuinely been the storytelling. The story feels truly epic"

It's been 18 months since *SWTOR* launched. What have been the greatest achievements and hardest challenges you've experienced developing the game since it launched?
The answer to both would be the comparatively seamless transition we made to being free-to-play. There were certainly hiccups and missteps along the way, but we made it a stated goal to preserve the integrity of the core game experience while also dramatically increasing the size of our player base and the resources available for us to grow and improve the game. The fact that our subscribers actually increased following the release of F2P shows that we did a good job of defending the core game experience, and it's something that I'm extremely personally proud about.

What has been the most exciting aspect of developing the *Rise Of The Hutt Cartel* digital expansion?
My favourite part of the Makeb experience has genuinely been the storytelling. The story feels truly epic, and in particular the cinematics are easily among the more awe-inspiring ones we've ever done.

What lessons have you learned through the development of *SWTOR* that has informed the *Rise Of The Hutt Cartel* digital expansion?
Really, it is how to tell stories better. Telling branching, multiplayer-capable BioWare-style stories is pretty much a new genre for writing and game design, and one with lots of subtle differences from writing for single-player BioWare games, or for traditional MMOs. We learned a lot of lessons developing the core game. With Makeb, we were able to start by reflecting on these lessons and mistakes and use it to inform our initial design, and so as a result there is almost no aspect of the storytelling on Makeb that isn't better – often substantially more so – than what we accomplished before.



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